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Unthinkables

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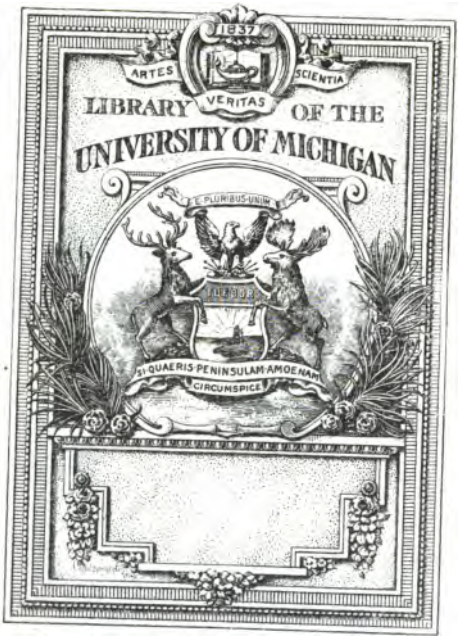
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Unthinkables

Unthinkables

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Discussed by

Frederic H. Balfour

Author of 'Cherryfield Hall,' 'Dr. Mirabel's Theory,' 'The Song of Songs,' &c.

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1897

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To

R. C. de la C.

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HOW TO BELIEVE IN NOTHING.

THE papers contained in this book are intended, primarily, for the thoughtless; a category, be it observed, by no means consisting wholly of persons who never think. For it is possible to think thoughtlessly; to think loosely; to think illogically; even to think self-contradictorily. And among those who thus think there are some who are, consciously or unconsciously, in search of a Belief in Something, while others are but too anxious to get rid of Belief in Anything. Both crave for dogma; for Belief and Unbelief, mark you, are psychologically identical—the believer holding a certain proposition to be true, the unbeliever holding it to be false. The opposite of Belief is not Unbelief, but Doubt. The man who believes

and the man who disbelieves are alike *certain*; the man who doubts is uncertain—he has not, like the others, as yet made up his mind. The only difference between the advocates of Belief and the advocates of Unbelief is that the former are desirous of believing Something, while the latter are equally desirous of believing Nothing; of being able to prove, that is, that there is Nothing to believe. It is in the interest of would-be converts to the comfortable and soothing creed of Nothingness that I now write, for I have long considered their case a very hard one. Many persons complain of the difficulty of believing in anything, but that is a trifle compared with the difficulty of believing in nothing. There are such hosts of things to be explained away—the world we live in, for example, the phantasms who pass themselves off as our fellow-creatures, the air we breathe, the light we see, even our own subjective individualities. Still, the task, though formidable enough at the first glance, is not, we think, beyond our power, and is, at any rate, well worth an effort. All the miseries of which we

are conscious—the poverty, the disappointments, the anxieties, the physical anguish, the bloodshed, the ingratitude, the raging lusts and passions of humanity—all spring from a belief —a purely empirical belief—in the existence of the Universe, of each other, and of ourselves. Once show that such belief is entirely without foundation, and the horrid vision vanishes, never to return.

It will be necessary, for the due elaboration of our argument, to begin by writing as though the Universe existed. This is the method adopted by Euclid, when he hypothesizes a palpable absurdity in order to prove the impossibility of something else being anything but what it is. Assuming, therefore, for convenience' sake, the truth of a proposition that we hope very shortly to demolish, we may make the further concession that the Universe is one. That is no more than fair. And it is all the more necessary to lay stress upon the objective unity of this hypothetical Universe, in view of the innumerable standpoints from which it is regarded. Things appear so differently to

different people, that if they really are what they seem they must be all sorts of different things themselves; and then the Universe would be nothing but a self-contradictory chaos, in which two and two might make either four or five, and its critics be left without any trustworthy basis of cognition, or argument, or perception. No candid person, however prejudiced, would, in his better moments, bring so serious a charge against the general scheme of things, and the fullest weight should be allowed to the consideration. But there is an art of seeing things as well as an art of putting things, and there are no rules for either; it is a matter of education, of association, of mental temperament; and in our views of life an *a priori* hypothesis is usually at the root of the picture we think we see. Each man, in fact, lives in a world of his own. The scheme of things in general, for instance, is a very different affair to the Dalai Lama from what it is to Colonel Robert Ingersoll. Each of these well-meaning persons views it with a different eye, with different prepossessions; in short, from a different stand-

point. No two objects of contemplation could be more widely divergent from each other, more utterly foreign and opposed, have less in common, than the world as seen by the Buddhist Pope, and the world as seen by the American iconoclast; yet it is the same world, with the same laws governing it, the same people in it, the same history, the same inevitable destiny. Or to take another illustration: There are, among us, two very estimable classes of persons, with whom we come frequently in contact—the Freemasons and the Spiritualists. Both, no doubt, read their Bibles; but what a different book that Bible is to each! To the enthusiastic Freemason, the Old Testament—if not the New—is in a great measure a record of the Mystic Craft. When the children of Israel gathered together at the door of the Tabernacle, that was a Lodge; the ceremony that took place on the river-bank after the passage of the Jordan was a Lodge, too; Abraham, Moses, and other notables of old, were Grand-masters of the Order. Lodges were held every day, of course, while Solomon's Temple was being built,

and when the chiefs of the people returned to Jerusalem during the Babylonish Captivity, they began holding Royal Arch Chapters. But with what different eyes does the Spiritualist read the Bible! To him it is a manual of Mediumship. The Witch of Endor was a psychic of the highest order, who succeeded in materializing the prophet Samuel; Elijah and his successor were healing mediums, and the former ended his career by an act of levitation which Mr. Home and Mrs. Guppy could but feebly imitate. The schools of the Sons of the Prophets were associations for the development of mediumistic powers; the assembly of the disciples on the Day of Pentecost was nothing more or less than a séance, at which some most remarkable manifestations were obtained. But I need not multiply instances. It is only necessary to impress upon the reader the inherently Protean nature of all objects whatever of which we can take cognizance, whether it be the material Universe (so called), or social institutions, or the living world of men and women, or anything else in the great scheme

of things in general. The thing is one, but the points of view from which it may be regarded are indefinitely numerous; so that while there can be but one objective Universe, the number of subjective universes present to the consciousness of sentient and thinking beings is practically infinite.

What standpoint, then, shall we select for the consideration of our theme? Clearly, the matter seems of no small importance; and equally clear is it that our standpoint should be the very widest possible. But it is difficult to be eclectic without becoming self-contradictory, and therefore unintelligible. If we inquire, at the outset, of what the Universe is made, we are at once bewildered by the conflicting answers we receive. We are told of the Impact theory and of the Nebular theory; we may take our choice between cosmic vapour and cosmic dust, while the Editor of *Nature*—whom we must not confound with the Author of Nature—postulates a primordium full of stones. It is really impossible for a plain man to decide between so many attractive suggestions. Whatever the

primitive matter may have been, it must, at any rate, have been so light, so rarefied, that, according to Helmholtz, at the remote epoch when our present planetary system was a mere nebulous haze pervading space in a vague and general way, it would have required several millions of cubic miles of it to weigh a single grain. This is a very cheerful thought, and ought to make us thankful for terra firma; but it scarcely leads us very far, and as no one seems to be agreed as to what the ultimate particles of matter are in themselves, we will not dwell upon it any longer at present. After all, it is only a question of raw material, and this we are not in a position to solve. Let us, in the interest of those who feel the problem of the Universe a weight too heavy to be borne, advance a stage backwards. How came the Universe into being at all? Here, it must be confessed, we seem to be temporarily foiled. Scientific men will tell us, confidently enough, that the simplest elements of matter were formed first after the condensation of the primæval aura, the combinations becoming more and more complex, until they

reached that subtle thing which is the Physical Basis of Life, and which, starting in water as a structureless speck of jelly, has reached its fullest development in man. This is interesting enough, but it does not quite touch the point. Whence came those primitive elements? Here is, or seems to be, the Universe; it is, or seems to be, a particularly solid and stubborn fact; its existence, or apparent existence, claims to be accounted for somehow; and the question confronting us is, How?

Help is immediately at hand. It is our premises that are wrong. Mr. Herbert Spencer —a thinker who has absorbed and concentrated in himself the researches of well-nigh all his contemporaries, and, passing them through the crucible of his most capacious mind, has moulded them into a complete system of Synthetic Philosophy—tells us that there are three, and *only* three, ways in which the Universe can conceivably be accounted for. The first is that the Universe never came into being at all, because it was never out of being; it is self-existent, always has existed, cannot help

existing; there never was a time when it did not exist. This is the Atheistic theory; and, as Mr. Spencer shows clearly enough, it leaves us just where we were before. Self-existence necessarily means existence without a beginning, and by no mental effort can we conceive of this. The theory is therefore unthinkable; and even if it were not unthinkable it affords no solution of the mystery. Secondly, there are those who say that the Universe made itself. This is the Pantheistic theory, and a very amusing one it is. For mark, before a thing is made it is clearly non-existent; and we are asked to believe that, at a certain epoch in time, non-existence, or nothing, began to create itself into something; or, to put it conversely, that this something began to create itself before it existed, and that the result of its exertions was itself. A more delightful network of contradictions and absurdities assuredly was never woven; the idea is so hopelessly at variance with the laws of thought that it is difficult to put it into the Queen's English. It is true that the upholders of this theory attempt to modify

its grotesqueness by postulating what they call potential existence, which afterwards passed into actual existence; but it will not do. In the first place, the transition from potential to actual existence is as unthinkable as self-existence, for the reason that it implies a change without a cause; in the second place, it entirely fails to tell us where potential existence itself first came from. We have now only one more theory to fall back upon, namely, that the Universe was created by a power outside itself. This is the Theistic theory. But, alas! even this involves unthinkabilities just as unthinkable as either of the other two. At the very outset we find that the real mystery, the production of something out of nothing, is still unaccounted for. We can easily imagine the formation of suns and worlds, which simply implies the arrangement of pre-existing elements; but whence came the pre-existing elements? And even if there were no elements, nothing but an immeasurable void, whence came that? Was it created? Was there ever a time when space itself was not?

Then there must have been a creating power, and that power self-existent. But self-existence is unthinkable in any form, whether as a self-existent power or a self-existent Universe. Creation by external agency suggests the question, How came there to be an external agency? To account for this we are once more thrown back upon the old three theories we started with—the creating power must be either self-existent, self-created, or created by some other creating power; and all these hypotheses are just as unthinkable when applied to the creating power as when applied to the material Universe. We see, then, that all three theories respecting the origin of the Universe involve some absurdities, some impossibilities, and all of them are unthinkable.

And thus we come within sight of our goal. For what is the conclusion in which we find ourselves landed? Let us put the arguments as follows:

I. *There are only three conceivable methods by which the Universe can have come into existence.*

II. *Each of these three methods is proved to be unthinkable and impossible.*

III. *It is therefore clear that the Universe does not exist.*

So far so good. And the conclusion need not surprise us. The mere fact that we think we see the Universe, or part of it, is, as we shall show conclusively later on, nothing to the point. For, whatever else we may be, it is undeniable that we are on all sides and at all times the helpless victims of Illusion. Illusions of sight, illusions of hearing, illusions of touch, are among the very commonest commonplaces of psychology. Read Mr. James Sully on Illusions, and you will soon be filled with a healthy, vigorous doubt of the veracity of your own sense-organs that you will find, I assure you, most exhilarating. Read Hegel and Bishop Berkeley, and if you are not speedily delivered from the superstition of sense-perception it will only prove still more convincingly how strong illusions are. We only think there is a Universe because we are conscious of certain subjective sensations which we empirically attri-

bute to an objective cause. But, try as we may, we cannot get beyond those sensations, which, so far from enlightening us, only lead us astray. And if there are only three ways in which a Universe can be accounted for, and every one of them is proved to involve a violation of all reason and all possibility, the conclusion that no Universe exists at all is manifest.

Indeed, when we look a little deeper into the affair, we shall find much to support our inference from several quarters. Let us take one of the most universal, most apparently unmistakable, objects of perception, about which, one would think, there could not possibly be any room for illusion. I mean Light. Don't we see it streaming down upon us from the sun above, pervading the atmosphere to the furthest limits of the horizon, and evoking all those delicate and royal hues that make the world so lovely? It seems hard at first to deny that light exists; and yet I think that we are justified in doing so. Nay, the reasoning is as clear as light itself. Everybody knows that

action at a distance is impossible. The intervening space must be bridged over somehow; and light could no more travel from the sun to the earth through an absolute void than a man could cross a chasm a hundred feet in width without a bridge. In order, therefore, to provide a pathway for the pencils of light, physicists have postulated a thin, subtle, tenuous gas called ether, which, they tell us, pervades interstellar space. The difficulty seems, therefore, solved satisfactorily enough, and no more, one would think, need be said about it. But, luckily for us, the difficulty is not solved; it is only pushed one step further back. For this ether is not a solid, homogeneous mass; like all other matter, it consists of molecules, all probably in a state of very rapid motion. Now a molecule is a spherical body, and its size is so small that nobody ever has seen, or probably ever will see, a specimen. According to Mr. Clodd, a molecule of water is about the five-hundred-millionth of an inch in diameter; that is to say, if a drop of water the size of a pea were enlarged to the size of the globe, the mole-

cules of which it is composed would be about as large as cricket-balls. It follows, then, that, as ether consists of globular molecules all gyrating and colliding with each other at a rapidity of billions of rebounds a second, there must be vacant spaces between them—spaces infinitely small, of course, but still spaces that are absolutely unoccupied, as far as our present argument goes. How, then, can light pass from one molecule to another? A medium between molecules is just as necessary for the transmission of light as a medium between stars. Or, as Mr. Spencer puts it, "instead of a direct action by the sun upon the earth without anything intervening, we have to conceive the sun's action propagated through a medium whose molecules are probably as small relatively to their interspaces as are the sun and the earth compared with the space between *them;* we have to conceive these infinitesimal molecules acting on each other through absolutely vacant spaces which are immense in comparison with their own dimensions." And of course we cannot conceive anything of the sort. Shall we

fill these vacant spaces with yet minuter molecules, also separated from each other by other vacant spaces, and so on to infinity? But by the very hypothesis there would still be vacant spaces, and over vacant spaces no light can ever travel. Here, again, we have clear proof that, according to the ascertained laws of the Universe we think we see, no light can possibly reach us from the sun; in other words, light itself is one of the many illusions of our senses.

But our anxious inquirer may not yet be satisfied. The reasoning is too easy, the conclusion too good to be true. We have only, so far, the argument from the side of physics; the metaphysical view has been scarcely so much as glanced at. The objection is most reasonable, and we will at once deal with it. Moreover, we shall have the inestimable advantage of discussing the question metaphysically with the assistance of a very deep and subtle thinker, who is not only not a materialist, but a man who despises metaphysics quite as cordially as he despises theology itself—a guarantee for im-

partiality which we are sure will be considered the very highest that any earnest seeker after truth could possibly desire or expect.

Now, it is clear that a 'Grammar of Science' does not and cannot concern itself with the contents of science any more than an English grammar deals with English literature; but simply lays down, in a succinct form, the methods and limits of scientific inquiry. The present work, however, is even narrower and more circumspect than the reader might naturally suppose, for it is devoted to proving that science—physical science, of course—*has no contents to inquire about.* This is evidently the very book we want, and Professor Karl Pearson, of University College, London, deserves our heartiest thanks for his assistance in our search after a Belief in Nothing. Let us see how he achieves his results.

To begin with, we invite the attention of our readers to the following proposition, which occurs on p. 72:

"We may infer what we cannot verify by direct sense-impression *only* when the inference is from known

things to unknown things of the like nature in similar surroundings.

"Thus, we may not infer an infinite Consciousness outside the physical surroundings of finite Consciousness; we may not infer a man in the moon, however like in nature to ourselves, because the physical surroundings in the moon are not such as we find man in here."

Clearly, then, we may not infer the existence of a Supreme Being unless we first postulate a nervous system for Him; for "Consciousness has no meaning beyond nervous systems apart from our own; it is illogical to assert that all matter is conscious, still more that consciousness can exist outside matter" (p. 91).

Nor may we infer the existence of a man in the moon, because there is neither air nor water there; still less may we infer a moon-man to whom air and water are unnecessary, because we have no experience of such beings. Similarly, a race of individuals who had never cast net or line into the sea would be illogical in assuming the possible existence of lobsters, whales, and fish, seeing that their only experience of living creatures was confined to such as would promptly

die of suffocation if immersed beneath the waves. It is evident that, in this instance, supposing them to have been illogical, they would, nevertheless, have been right, for it by no means follows that a belief which is irresistible is therefore true; but that is nothing to the point, while the intrusion of uncouth facts into an argument dealing strictly with abstract generalities is very obviously an impertinence.

Professor Pearson then proceeds to show that all our so-called knowledge is purely and entirely subjective. He compares the conscious Ego to a clerk in a Central Telephone Exchange, who has never been outside it, and knows nothing of the external world beyond the messages he receives and transmits—never, in fact, being able to get nearer to his customers than his own end of the telephone-wire. In a word, we have no knowledge whatever of the nature of the world alleged to lie around us. All we can know are sense-impressions; that is, the Universe (so called) constitutes "a sphere which we have recognized [*supra*] as unknown and unknowable." Of course, the proposition is self-evident, and

the way in which the Professor rubs it in fills us with excited anticipation as to what is to come next.

"The laws, if we can speak of laws, of this sphere must be as unknown as its contents, and therefore to talk of its contents as producing sense-impressions is an unwarranted inference, for we are asserting *cause and effect*—a law of phenomena or sense-impressions—to hold in a region beyond our experience. We *know* ourselves, and we *know* around us an impenetrable wall of sense-impressions. There is no necessity, nay, not even logic, in the statement that behind sense-impressions there are things in themselves *producing* sense-impressions. It is, indeed, an unjustifiable extension of the term knowledge to apply it to something which cannot be part of the mind's contents" (p. 81).

This is most encouraging. Professor Pearson evidently means business, and if we only follow him closely enough, we shall soon reach our goal. To say that we are hemmed in by an impenetrable wall of sense-impressions is good; but to add that we are totally unjustified in inferring objective existences beyond, which produce those sense-impressions, is excellent. The former statement is obvious even to that typical

common-sense Philistine 'the man in the street'; the latter has all the surprise, the audacity, the exquisite flavour of paradox, so grateful to a jaded intellectual palate. It is not only illogical to say that we have any knowledge of the world; it is illogical, it is illegitimate, to infer that there is any world at all—to say that the sense-impressions we are conscious of are the result of any producing cause. The venerable axiom that every effect must have a cause is thus abolished; it is the recognition of an effect that has and can have no cause whatever that alone is logical and scientific. We are conscious of a certain sense-impression, and we say, 'I see the sun'; but it is illegitimate to infer that the sun actually and objectively exists. As we write, we hear the sound of wind and waves and rain outside the windows; but we are not permitted to say that the rain is really falling, and the wind blowing great guns—no, not even if we are rash enough to go outside ourselves, and let the rain wet us to the skin, and the wind blow our umbrella inside out. For "our mind is absolutely confined within its nerve-exchange;

beyond the walls of sense-impression it can logically infer nothing" (p. 130). And again: "Of the world outside sense-impression science can only logically infer chaos, or the absence of the conditions of knowledge; no human concept, order, reason, or consciousness can be logically projected into it" (p. 135).

This last sentence contains a fresh point, to which we shall recur later. At present we are concerned with Mr. Pearson's assurance that it is illogical and illegitimate to infer from our own sense-impressions the existence of objective realities producing them from outside, and here, we regret to say, the old Adam, or old Philistine, in us is perverse enough to see what appears to be a certain inconsistency in Mr. Pearson. Why, it asks, did Mr. Pearson write this very clever and exhilarating book? The world whose existence he says it is illegitimate to infer is composed to all appearance of an immense variety of things; and among those things, forming part of this imaginary and phantom world, are certainly the people for whose benefit he writes. That is to say, he writes for certain phenomena

whose actual and objective existence it is illogical for him to believe in—for creations of his brain, in fact, or various groups of sense-impressions existing only in the consciousness of Mr. Pearson himself; for by his own showing he would sin most grievously against his own logic if he supposed them to have any actual and objective existence. And it may be lucky for him if he is correct; for it is possible that among Mr. Pearson's acquaintances there are some who would distinctly resent being called a potential sense-impression of Mr. Pearson's consciousness. They would feel that they have as good a right to call Mr. Pearson a sense-impression as he has to call them one, or Daniel O'Connell to call the old apple-woman a parallelogram. To us, who of course are wiser, Mr. Pearson's book cannot under any circumstances be a cause of irritation. According to his own argument, it is itself nothing but a sense-impression in our subjective consciousness, without any objective reality behind it; and no one in his senses would ever lose his temper with a sense-impression, unproduced by anything we have any logical

right to affirm as existing in a sphere where pure science recognizes chaos *et preterea nihil.*

We now come to an amplification of the points touched upon above, in the quotation from p. 135. Mr. Pearson is speaking of the materialistic heresies of Hooker and the Stoics, and this is what he says:

"As materialists they project these sense-impressions into a real outside world, unconditioned by and independent of man's perceptive faculty."

Of course this is highly improper on the part of Hooker and the Stoics, but it is nothing to what follows.

"Then they infer Reason behind the concatenation of phenomena. Now, Reason is known to us only in association with Consciousness, and we find Consciousness only with the accompaniments of a certain type of nervous organism. Thus, to infer Reason in what has been previously postulated as outside and independent of this type of nervous organism is unjustifiable; it may be dogma, but it is not logic (p. 108).

"But how, it may be asked, has the conception that Reason exists behind phenomena become so widespread? . . . So soon as man begins to form conceptions from his sense-impressions, to combine, to isolate, and to generalize, then he begins to project his *own*

Reason into phenomena; . . . he unconsciously severs himself from the products of his own Reason and projects them into phenomena, only to re-find them again and wonder what Reason put them there.

"The Reason we find in natural phenomena is surely put there by the only Reason of which we have any experience, namely, the human Reason. The logic man finds in the Universe is but the reflection of his own reasoning faculty" (pp. 109, 110).

But the Universe (the existence of which it is illogical to infer from our sense-impressions) clearly *includes the nervous systems of human beings like ourselves*, and these nervous systems with their attendant Consciousness we are, therefore, as rigorously forbidden to believe in as in any other part of the apparently objective Universe. Let us, then, apply this great discovery to some familiar experience of our daily life. Instead of a philosopher contemplating the general scheme of things, let us take an art-critic standing in front of a great picture, and forming his judgment upon it. He admires the chiaroscuro, and acknowledges the painter to be a colourist of considerable merit; he sees exactly what the painter was driving at; he

recognizes the effort and the ideal underlying the performance; he condemns the want of unity or the defective massing, and detects a fault of proportion or perspective as the case may be. In a few minutes he has made up his mind as to the capacities of the artist (whom he has never seen), and conveys his impressions to—say Mr. Pearson. And then Mr. Pearson replies, "My dear Sir, you are criticizing the wrong man. It is totally illogical, in the first place, to infer the existence of either picture or picture-painter; while, in the second place, as to the merits and defects you talk about, you have simply projected them upon the phenomenon you call a picture out of your own consciousness. Is the picture fine? It is you who deserve the credit. Is it a worthless daub? It is you, and you alone, who have made it so, and you must bear the blame."

The logical issue of Mr. Pearson's arguments, therefore, is clearly that (1) I who write (or you who read) am the creator of my own Universe; that (2) it is illegitimate to infer that that Universe has any independent or actual exist-

ence; and that (3) I (or you) am consequently the One and Only Being. There can be no doubt about No. 3, whatever Mr. Pearson may say about inferring 'other' consciousness when associated with a nervous system, for, as we have already pointed out, it is indisputable that the nervous systems of other so-called people are, popularly speaking, objective to me (or you), and therefore, being really nothing but subjective sense-impressions, form part of the world the existence of which it is forbidden by his argument to infer. I (or you) must regard every other man as no more than a sense-impression of my (or your) own, and myself (or yourself) as the creator and only inhabitant of a non-existent sphere where naught is everything and everything is naught. The idea is a little staggering at first, but we shall soon get used to it. It is only that trivial sense-impression we call the gross Philistine who will cry, 'Karl, thou art beside thyself; much learning hath made thee mad!'

And now, having annihilated the Universe and extinguished Light, it is only natural that

we should congratulate ourselves upon having nothing left to believe in. But we must not be too hasty. The Universe is not everything; there are abstract truths which are independent of material forms, and—more important still—there are Ourselves. All through our argument we have taken our own existence for granted, and this without the slightest attempt to support the assumption. Nothing could be more unscientific than to build so important a superstructure upon an unproved hypothesis. Do we exist? is the question now before us. Kant says we do. He analyzed self-consciousness, and proved (to his own satisfaction and that of his followers) that the Ego was separable into subject and object—that is, that each individual self could know itself and think about itself. And the great mass of ordinary people (allowing for convenience' sake that they exist) unthinkingly agree with him. Surely, they say, we know that *we* exist. Of that first and last possession not all the philosophers who ever talked or wrote can possibly deprive us. We require no arguments to prove our own exist-

ence, nor can there be any argument adequate to prove the contrary. And yet they had better not be too sure; Kant has not said the last word upon the subject. Doubts—grave doubts—have been raised, and it is now asserted that that of which we feel most certain may prove to be the very thing that it is logically impossible to be certain about—indeed, clear and indisputable as our own existence may seem to each of us, *reason positively forbids us to believe in it.* Mr. Spencer contradicts Kant flatly, and uses more decided language on this point than on either of the others we have been considering. "Unavoidable," he says, "as is this belief" in the Ego, the individual mind, the persistent element of consciousness, "established though it is not only by the consent of mankind at large endorsed by divers philosophers, but by the suicide of the sceptical argument, it is yet a belief admitting of no justification by reason—nay, it is a belief which reason, when pressed for a distinct answer, *rejects.*" This is plain speaking; there is no doubt, no hesitancy, here. And the argument is so brief, so clear, so simple. Let us have it

in the philosopher's own words. "The mental act," he says, "in which self is known, implies, like any other mental act, a perceiving subject and a perceived object. If, then, the object perceived is self, what is the subject that perceives? Or if it is the true self which thinks, what other self can it be that is thought of? Clearly a true cognition of self implies a state in which the knowing and the known are one—in which subject and object are identified, and this is rightly held to be *annihilation of both.* So that the personality of which each is conscious, and of which the existence is to each a fact beyond all others the most certain, is a thing which cannot be known at all; knowledge of it is forbidden by the very nature of thought."

Now, what can be clearer than this? Kant's theory of the separability of the Ego is demolished at once. Instead of our being able to know ourselves, respect ourselves, or think about ourselves, we can do nothing of the kind; any such attempt would bring about the speedy annihilation of any Ego so viciously disposed.

Mr. Spencer's reasoning is absolutely conclusive.

First, he tells us that there is a mental act in which *self is known.*

Second, he tells us that this knowledge of self implies a state in which the knowing self and the known self are annihilated.

Third, he tells us that *self-knowledge is therefore impossible.*

It is only the grovelling person who clings to a Belief in Something that is likely to see any contradiction between the first and third members of this argument. Mr. Spencer knows what he is about. Evidently, even if we do exist, it is impossible for us to know it; and this is really tantamount to not existing at all. We are shadows, nothings, or, at the very best, dreams, though who the dreamer is in whose consciousness we figure of course we cannot tell, and no doubt the existence of such a dreamer is in itself unthinkable. Nothing could be more encouraging. There is not, because there cannot be, any Universe, any Light, any Self, or, what amounts to the same thing,

any Knowledge of Self. That is the last word of philosophy. The impossibility of any such existence is clearly proved by the greatest thinker of our age.

But we have not even yet exhausted everything; there are still certain so-called abstract truths left—truths independent of material forms—which must surely always be, and always have been. A rather ingenious little book was published some years ago by an anonymous author, called 'The Two Kinds of Truth.' There is the Empirical or Particular Truth, and the Universal or Necessary Truth, and it is very important carefully to distinguish between them, never to mistake one for the other. For example, the law of gravitation comes under the former category. It is true, as far as our observations go, that all material bodies attract with a force varying directly as their mass, and indirectly as the squares of their distances. But there appears no intrinsic necessity why they should always do so. Surely it is legitimate to imagine a Universe where equilibrium was maintained by some other process. Gravitation is, after all, only

an arbitrary mechanical contrivance to bring about certain ends which might conceivably be brought about by some other contrivance, equally arbitrary and equally mechanical. But there are other truths which are absolute, universal, eternal, necessary; and of these are the truths of geometry. There never has been, and there never can be, a circle the radii of which are unequal, or a right-angled triangle in which the square of the hypotenuse is not equal to the two squares on the subtending sides. We need not bother ourselves with Mr. J. S. Mill's contention that there are no objective realities corresponding to our subjective mathematical conceptions. It is possible, of course, as he says, that in the material world (so called) 'there exist no points without magnitude, no lines without breadth or perfectly straight, no circles with all their radii exactly equal, or squares with all their angles perfectly right.' This is no more than saying that we possess no instruments sufficiently delicate to form mathematical figures which, under the most transcendently powerful microscope, should exhibit no irregularity of line;

and it is, at any rate, as possible that accident should produce a perfect right-angle or an equal-radii'd circle as an imperfect and irregular one. But, of course, the main answer is obvious. Show me a figure, and say, 'There is a circle, and its radii are not exactly equal,' and I reply at once, 'Then it is not a circle.' A circle with unequal radii, a square whose angles are not true right angles, is simply a contradiction in terms. Two parallel lines in the same plane, even if indefinitely prolonged, can never meet; were two lines under such conditions eventually to intersect each other, they would not be parallel. One might as well talk about a round square, or a present past, or a footless stocking without a leg. Here, then, one would think, surely we cannot escape from a Belief in Something. The abstract truths of mathematics are absolute and eternal truths. Whatever else we are able to explain away, the axioms and postulates of Euclid are irrefutable.

And yet even they may be challenged. There is a school of mathematicians who traverse the very foundations of the Euclidean system, and

call in question the actuality of Euclidean space. Now, space is popularly supposed to be flat, as far as such an attribute can be predicated of mere extension—flat in the sense that there is nothing in it to prevent anybody from drawing a perfectly straight line between any two given points, a line which shall lie flat or evenly between such points. But cases have been known in which astronomers have observed displacements in the line of vision; in which, on attempting to ascertain the parallax of a certain star, the angle of intersection between the lines of vision was found to be different from that required by the known facts and laws of optics and astronomy. How is this to be accounted for? Well, there are those who tell us that it is because space is not flat, but *curved.* This curvature of space is a favourite hypothesis of Transcendental Geometers; and if it is a true hypothesis, there can be no such thing, even in geometry, as a straight line. Every line we call straight must be curved, and therefore two so-called straight lines, being really curved, may very easily enclose a portion of space, and two

apparently parallel lines may actually meet. According to Lobatchewsky, it is conceivable that there may be two non-parallel lines in the same plane which on being produced indefinitely would yet never meet; and it has even been suggested that the curvature of space itself is not regular, but that space may be compared to a piece of paper which has been lightly crumpled up, leaving some parts flat—or nearly so—others slightly curved, and others, again, almost angular. As, then, in the rush of the Solar System through this irregularly constituted space we may find ourselves now in flat space and now in curved, it follows that our astronomical observations and mathematical measurements may vary; that we have no constant basis for either; and that whereas in flat space an object, say, a million miles off would appear a million miles off, in curved space there would be an appreciable difference between its real and apparent distance—a difference equal to that between the base or third side of a triangle and the sum of its subtending sides. In this case Euclid must be laid on the shelf. If space is

curved, nothing is certain ; the 12th Axiom is a mistake, and parallel lines may meet.*

* A writer in the *Electrical Review* remarks : "We have no more means of determining if there is an error in the estimate of the magnitude of the three angles than a man would have of determining the curvature of the earth from a square inch of surface of a pond. Suppose three angles of a triangle are less than two right angles by the billionth of a second, how does this affect the properties of space? We should then have every pair of parallel lines meeting within a finite distance, and it would be possible to travel in a straight line continuously, and to return to the starting-point in a finite time, having travelled over a finite path. Space, then, need neither be infinite nor need it have boundaries any more than a spherical surface is infinite or has boundaries. . . . The whole of the ether of space would be a closed globule, perhaps spherical in shape, and matter would be a galaxy of nucleoli inside that globule." To which the unregenerate may reply: (1) that if any so-called parallel lines did meet, that fact would prove them to be not parallel, for parallel lines which meet involve as clear a contradiction in terms as a circle with unequal radii; and (2) the statement may be questioned that a sphere has no boundaries. Surely it is bounded by its surface, and if space is a globe with a galaxy of nucleoli inside it, it must have a surface, and what is there outside that? The argument is that if space be spherical, and a man were to follow his nose indefinitely, he would eventually arrive at the very point from which he started. In other words, the universe, or space, would be proved finite, and yet, though finite, it would still baffle us, for we should

For those, therefore, who desire universal scepticism, universal negation, every possible facility is at hand. There is nothing which may not be denied, and that on the highest scientific and philosophical authority. Not only is the external world an illusion; one's very identity may be demolished, and consciousness itself relegated to the same realm of dreams and shadows into which everything else has been dissolved.

> 'Thou canst not prove that I who speak with thee
> Am not thyself in converse with thyself;
> For nothing worthy proving can be proved'—

Ah, but that cuts both ways, does it not? And there are some, we must not forget, who still

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never discover its limits, but flying this way or that, through extent apparently boundless, be constantly arriving at places we had visited before, prisoners without walls, free to move any distance in any direction, yet eternally confined to a mysterious area in which the further we moved from any given point the nearer should we approach it along the very path we traverse. It seems that one rather important consideration is here overlooked. If we are indeed living in the interior of this capsule, what is there—hypothetically, of course—to prevent us from emerging on the surface of it, just as a needle poked through an orange would emerge upon the rind?

have a yearning after something solid, something more satisfactory even than nihilism, however logical; and to them the poet says:

> '*Nor yet disproven;* wherefore be thou wise;
> Cleave ever to the sunnier side of doubt,
> And cling to faith beyond the forms of faith!
>
> * * * * *
>
> For knowledge is the swallow on the lake,
> That sees and stirs the surface-shadow there,
> But never yet hath dipt into the Abysm,
> The Abysm of all Abysms, beneath; within
> The blue of sky and sea, the green of earth,
> And in the million-millionth of a grain,
> Which, cleft and cleft again for evermore,
> And, ever vanishing, never vanishes—
> To me, my son, more mystic than myself,
> Or even than the Nameless is to me.'

SALVATION BY METAPHYSICS.

"MAN," said Goethe, "is not born to solve the mystery of existence; but he must, nevertheless, attempt it, in order that he may learn how to keep within the limits of the Knowable." The mystery of existence—of Being in the abstract—is as much a mystery to-day as it was in the times of Xenophanes the Rhapsodist, and Parmenides the Logician; perhaps it is insoluble by reason of the very conditions of human thought. But though we may never reach the solution, we may be constantly getting nearer to it—just as a recurring decimal will lead us nearer to the desired quotient to all eternity, but never suffer us to arrive; and the first stage in our journey will be marked when we are able to give some definite account of the essential

constitution of Matter. Hitherto no one has succeeded in the quest. To the inquiry, 'What *is* Matter?' we have many answers; but none of them is final and satisfactory. One school of metaphysicians deny that we have any proofs of its objective existence at all, since all our senses tell us is that we are conscious of certain changes in sensation; and sensation is purely subjective. We may see a man, and touch a man; but that proves nothing as regards the existence of anything outside ourselves. A certain change in our subjective consciousness that we call sight and touch is all that we can be sure of, all that we have any right to recognise. Again, we are told that Matter is phenomenal merely; that is, that it is nothing more than the phenomenon, projection, or appearance of some underlying and invisible noumenon, or reality—the manifestation of a hidden and intrinsic substance, using that word in its metaphysical sense of substratum. John Stuart Mill defined it as 'the permanent possibility of sensation'; while the contributor of an article to the 'Penny Cyclopedia' calls it 'everything in the

universe that is not Mind.' One can scarcely admire too much the lordly independence of this most remarkable definition. It reminds us of the venerable witticism which one would unwillingly let die: 'What is Mind? No matter. —What is Matter? Never mind.'

As, however, we have attempted or suggested a theory respecting this crucial mystery in another essay, we will not follow out the question here. Whether Matter exists or not, we have most unquestionably certain relations to that which we—empirically, it may be—*call* Matter; and it is with those relations that we now propose to deal. To the question, 'Are things really what they seem?' Longfellow, in his 'Psalm of Life,' gave a distinctly negative reply. It is not probable that the poet was speaking metaphysically, or intended to express an irrelevant opinion upon the much misunderstood theory of Bishop Berkeley; yet his words, taken apart from their context, will do equally well as the enunciation of a well-known metaphysical doctrine, and suggest a train of fascinating and instructive thought. The question is a very

simple one. We are—or appear to be—surrounded by an external world, including our own bodies, external to ourselves. Do we see the things which compose this world as they actually are, or do we not? In other words, are our perceptive senses veracious reporters, or do they play us false?

The natural reply which springs to the lips of the plain man is of course to the effect that our senses are, in health, entirely reliable. If a table is six feet long, we see it as six feet, and not as twelve or two. If a flower is red, we see it as red, and not as blue or yellow. If a substance is soft, we feel it as soft, and not as hard or prickly. But a very little consideration will show the literal superficiality, and therefore inaccuracy, of this view. We do not see a table, for instance, as it really is. We are simply conscious of resistance, hardness, smoothness, extension, weight, shape, temperature, and colour; but to see it as it is, we must be able to perceive the inner structure of the material, the arrangement of its fibres, the weft of the grain, the chemical elements into which it is resolvable,

the ultimate atoms which are the basis of all mass or body, and the vacant spaces which divide these fundamental units from each other. The greenness of a leaf, it is easy enough to say, has its seat in chlorophyll; but the fact, as everybody knows, is that colour is no more than that state of subjective consciousness which is produced in the percipient by the combined action of his retina and the particular ray of light which is thrown off, instead of being absorbed, by the surface on which it falls. To see the leaf as it actually is, then, we must, in like manner, be able to scrutinize the chemical basis of the thing itself, to watch the very process of absorption and rejection, and so penetrate into those inmost recesses of matter and material transitions which occupy the extremest verge of the realm of physics. To the untutored man, again, the rainbow is an actual entity; its shape, its size, its colouring, are to him as real as the shape and size and colouring of a flower; he believes in its solidity, and fancies that it must be a bridge, leading to some celestial regions for the particular convenience of departing souls or

the denizens of another world. And yet that rainbow has no objective existence; no two persons, even, ever see the same rainbow, by reason of their different positions; it is simply an appearance produced by the interaction of a little light, a few drops of water, and perhaps a sprinkling of atmospheric dust. We perceive the figure of a man a mile off, and he looks a dwarf, though really six feet high; and the mere fact that we are not deceived, because we know the reason of the illusion, is no argument to prove that it is not an illusion after all. We speak of an object as large or small, light or heavy, on the most empirical and relative grounds; for a horse, it is said, sees objects three times the size that we do, and it might be difficult to *prove* that the horse's eye is a more misleading organ than our own. Who, by looking at a brick, would guess that in that agglomeration of reddish-gray dust there lies embedded nearly a pound of aluminium? While as for motion, no one can say whether it has any absolute existence or not. Take Mr. Spencer's illustration of a man walking from stem to stern

of a vessel sailing in the opposite direction at the same rate—he moves, sure enough, yet always occupies the same point in space; complicate the problem by taking into account the earth's diurnal motion on its axis, its annual rotation round the sun, and its flight with the sun through space, and it becomes increasingly difficult to say what motion really is. In a word, there can be little doubt that our sense-impressions are inadequate and unveracious, and have constantly to be corrected and kept in check by inhibitions from another sphere of influence altogether. We live in a world of illusions, and have no guarantee whatever—but rather the reverse—that the commonest things around us at all resemble that which they appear to us to be.

But now there arises another question. Have the things we see and handle any absolute existence of themselves? Metaphysicians belonging to many schools of thought will tell us that they have not. The objects around us, they say, are no more than simulachra, phenomena—projections, in short, of some mysterious entity

in the background uncognoscible by our senses, to which they bear very much the same relation as the picture thrown upon a white sheet bears to the glass slide hidden away in the recesses of a magic-lantern. Matter, in all its varied shapes, is nothing more than the effect produced upon our consciousness by what is called in metaphysical parlance 'substance'—the noumenon, reality, or essence which *substat*, or underlies, the outward appearance or phenomenon. Kant and Spinoza are among the most distinguished advocates of this theory, which dates, indeed, as far back as Anaxagoras, and was distinctly taught by Sextus Empiricus in the second century of our era. Its most distinguished opponent is Bishop Berkeley, who denied the existence of 'substance' altogether. This led many persons, Dr. Johnson among them, to suppose that Berkeley disbelieved in matter, and the great lexicographer imagined that he could refute the Bishop by simply kicking a stone. But Berkeley was not the imbecile that Johnson took him for. What he denied was not matter, but substance—that meta-

physical substratum of which matter was believed to be the projection or simulachrum merely. He rejected the substratum theory, and said that substance was a sheer figment, regarding what other metaphysicians called the appearances of things as the very things themselves. An invisible substratum may be inferred or hypothesized, but it is unprovable and unknowable. The qualities of things have no need of an objective substratum, because they have a subjective one; they are the modifications of a sensitive subject, and the synthesis of these sensations is the only substratum required.

Now, one would naturally think that there could be no *via media* between these two conflicting theories. Lotze, however, suggests a *tertium quid*, which is most striking in its naïveté, and, we may add, its poetic beauty. He does not deny the existence of an uncognoscible substratum at the back of things, but he does deny that things are no more than the phenomena which metaphysicians of the Kantian school affirm them to be. This excellent writer is, like all Germans, very metaphysical, very

idealistic, and remarkably verbose; and it is no easy matter to condense his laboured dissertations into a few concise sentences. But his view is to the following effect: Instead of external Nature being to the alleged substratum as a reflected picture to its slide, it resembles rather the glorious beauty of a scene upon the stage which results from the unsightly mechanism at work behind it. In short, he reverses the conception of the Realists. "The course of the universe is such a drama; its essential truth is the meaning set forth so as to be intelligible to the spirit; but the other, which we would often so fain know, and in which, deceived by prejudice, we first of all seek the true being of things, is nothing else than the framework on which rests the alone momentous actuality of the fair appearance." Then, after deprecating the complaint that in sensation the real properties of things are not represented, he concludes: "Let us therefore cease to lament as if the reality of things escaped our apprehension. On the contrary, *it consists in that as which they appear to us*, and all that they are before they are made

manifest to us is the mediating preparation for this final realization of their very being. The beauty of colours and tones, of warmth and fragrance, is what Nature in itself strives to produce and express, but cannot do by herself. For this it needs, as its last and noblest instrument, the sentient mind, which alone can put into words its mute striving, and, in the glory of sentient intuition, set forth in luminous actuality what all the motions and gestures of the external world were vainly endeavouring to express." He does not touch here upon the question we set out with—whether our senses are or are not veracious reporters of the objective (phenomenal) world. What he is thinking of is the controversy between those who hold with Berkeley and those who hold with Kant, and the view he takes goes some way towards reconciling the two. He agrees with Berkeley that things are not simulachra, but realities; while he does not deny the contention of Berkeley's opponents—that there is something which lies behind.

But what, it will naturally be asked, have all

these thrashed-out controversies to do with a man's salvation? How can a man's belief, or theory, or indifference, with regard to such abstruse questions as idealism, noumenalism, and the like, affect the welfare of his soul? The very notion that such may be the case is absurd to a Western mind. Not so, however, to Easterns; certainly not so to Buddhists. Outwardly viewed, Buddhism has its metaphysical side and its religious side, and, as a religion, a religion of countless gods and goddesses, superstitious rites, praying wheels, rosaries, litanies, and the like, cannot be assigned a high intellectual place. But this is only the lowest and most popular phase of Buddhism—the Buddhism of the uneducated masses. the Buddhism of the street and wayside shrine. Buddhism, the system of metaphysics, is generally—and rightly—regarded as a thing apart; but what is not so generally recognized is that *it is this same metaphysic*, taught by, or attributed to, Buddha, this dry, abstruse, transcendental doctrine, *in which the true religion of Buddha is to be found*, the popular 'religion'

of the masses being no more than a degenerate and bastard outgrowth. It is the metaphysic that saves, not the relic; true views as to so-called subject and object, the rejection of dualism, the identification of the self and the not-self, and knowledge of the intrinsic nature of that philosophical and mystic formula confounded by the ignorant with the *man* Buddha —these constitute the one thing needful, the path of wisdom and of light, the 'open sesame' to present and eternal happiness.

Now the teaching of Buddhism upon the question above referred to is not only interesting in itself, but, as we hope to show, extremely suggestive in view of the theories held by conflicting schools of metaphysical speculation in Europe. The visible Universe, it is proclaimed, is phenomenal, and phenomenal only. The whole system of Buddhism rests upon the essential difference between that which is seen and temporal, and that which is unseen and eternal. So far Buddha anticipates Kant, and all who hold with him, in regarding the world, which is changeable and destructible in forms,

as simply the external appearance of an underlying eternal Reality, and teaches that it is only those who have attained to true enlightenment that are able to perceive this Reality as existing. This leads to the further doctrine that all phenomena, as such, exist subjectively in the consciousness of every individual, and thus only; so that all differences between them are a matter of the purest imagination, and the whole world, in that sense, an illusion. Thus, he anticipates Berkeley in finding his synthesis in the human mind; for it was here, and not in a phantom underlying 'substance,' that Berkeley recognized the 'Reality' of his opponents. The following passage, from a conversation between Sakyamuni and his favourite disciple Ananda, is taken from the 'Surungama Sutra,' and throws clear light upon his teaching:

"Every phenomenon that presents itself to our knowledge is but the manifestation of mind. The entire theory of the causes of production throughout the infinite worlds is simply the result of mind, *which is the true substratum of all.*"

This is very much like Berkeleyism pure and simple. But there is also an approach to the view of Lotze in his teaching that there must be an underlying objective Reality as well; and this appears almost like a contradiction, until we remember that it is only by the attainment of Perception that we are able to recognize it, thus calling in the mind and making it the subjective basis of the entire Universe as it appears to us. Of course, when he comes to discuss the nature of the underlying Reality he passes out of the sphere of modern metaphysics altogether. The underlying Reality is identical with his own person —is, in fact, the very Buddha himself; *that* is the true nature of all things, which are thus fundamentally identical with each other, and Truth, the object of every Buddhist's search, is nothing more than the identity of all things, all minds, all beings, and all Buddhas, past, present, and to come.

The idea, we must own, is a little difficult to grasp. Let us seek an amplification of it

in the teaching of one of the most eminent members of the Buddhist Church. He will show us how the Buddha ceases to be either God or man, and is seen to be no more than a state of mind, that highest and purest development of the intellect in which is reflected the Hidden Reality of All Things, which apprehends the Truth, which sees that the Universe and the senses, the perceiver and the perceived, are really and in essence One. It is here that the cleavage between Eastern and Western metaphysics occurs.

There can be no greater mistake than to suppose that Buddhism is a homogeneous system. Its broad divisions into Red Church and Yellow Church, Mahayana and Hinayana, Northern Buddhism and Southern Buddhism, are, of course, familiar to the most superficial student; but overlapping these there are numerous sects, answering very much to the churches and sects of Christendom. Now Buddhism is, and always has been, one of the great missionary religions of the world; and of the various sects into which it is divided,

none is more amply endowed with the missionary spirit than the sect of Nichiren, or Sun Lotus, so called from the name of its founder, a Japanese priest who was born in the year 1222 of our era. And with the name of its founder it has inherited his ardent, indeed, aggressively proselytizing, zeal, having only a short time back put forth a most remarkable manifesto, or profession of faith, addressed to the whole world, in order that all persons now alive might have a chance of salvation. "Indian Buddhism," said Nichiren himself, "came from the West to the East. Japanese Buddhism will go from the East to the West." His followers are attempting to carry out his prediction. A few years ago there died, not far from Tokyo, an estimable and respected prelate, known as the Most Learned and Virtuous Nissatsŭ Arai, Archbishop of Ikegami, who left behind him a 'Digest of the Doctrines of Nichiren,' lately edited and published by the Right Virtuous Kobayashi Nitto, Abbot and President of the Nichiren College at Takanawa. A few extracts from the manifesto in question will suffice to

elucidate the metaphysical theories on which the system rests.

"The original doctrine of the 'Holy Book of the Lotus of the Good Law'* is twofold," writes the Archbishop. "In the first place it teaches that the visible, inhabited world, which is changeable and destructible, is but the external appearance of an underlying eternal Reality; in the second place, it teaches the original enlightenment of all living beings.

* * * * *

"And now, what is this 'Good Law' so called? Well, it is simply that collection of doctrines found in the 'original' part of the book referred to. The Holy Book, it must be understood, consists of two parts: the 'original' or 'fundamental,' and the 'subordinate,' respectively. The former treats of the Original Buddha and the original reality of all living beings, while the latter deals with the Subordinate Buddha and the derived or temporary condition of all living beings. Thus, the Buddha is conceived of under a twofold aspect: one, as originally or self enlightened, the other as having attained enlightenment only after study and meditation. Again, the real state of living beings connotes the reality of things as perceived by the Buddha intellect—that is, their natural and true

* The 'Saddharma pundarika Sutra.'

condition. Now, the real state of visible things is one of emptiness and relativity. All phenomena, mental and material, in all times and spaces, are to be conceived of as existing subjectively in the consciousness of every individual, as his own physical and mental states, and thus only; so that the differences and varieties which distinguish things from one another must be regarded as purely imaginary and misleading, without any foundation in fact. Grasp this, and you have the Truth, and everything will then appear to you as it is in reality; you will see it as it is in itself.

"This Truth is to be found everywhere and always —in the past, the present, and the future; it exists in every part of space, above and below, to the right and to the left, in front and behind. Look up—there are the sun, the moon, and millions of stars; look down—there are mountains, rivers, plants, trees, and minerals; and between these there are human beings, animals, birds, reptiles, and insects. Well, all these things are nothing but subjective phases in the consciousness of each man's individual Self. They are all contained in a single act of thought; in fact, there is no distinction between the individual Self and the whole external world. When once this Truth is apprehended, we are said to have attained to the Great Self—that is, the summit of all enlightenment. This attainment is referred to in the words of Buddha as found in the Holy Book: 'I have been the Buddha of Original Enlightenment from all eternity.'

"This discovery was made by Sakyamuni when he was thirty years of age. It was after his perception of the Truth that Sakyamuni was called the Subordinate Buddha; while, as the Buddha of Original Enlightenment, *i.e.*, as the Personification of Truth, he is called the Original Buddha. Then, desiring to teach the people that any one of them could likewise become a Buddha, he advanced the doctrines contained in a sacred work called the 'Kegon Kyo.'* But they were very slow to understand; their intelligence, in fact, was insufficient to grasp so great a truth; so he was obliged to confine his instructions for more than forty years to the Disciplines, the practice of which was necessary as a preparation for the reception of the higher doctrines. It was only when he was seventy years old that he was able to revert to his former project. Then he taught what will be found in the first chapter of the Holy Book: 'It is only Buddhas, *i.e.*, enlightened ones, who can, with me, investigate the reality of things.' This refers to the doctrine that all things in all times and all departments of space are, in essence, fundamentally identical with the Buddha. . . . All things and phenomena, being essentially identical with the Buddha, or Reality, are eternal and unchangeable *au fond*, and, in their true nature, one and the same as each other. The vulgar see variety where Buddhas perceive identity. This inability to see anything beneath the external

* The 'Buddhavatamsaka-mahavaipulya Sutra.'

variety of things arises from confusion in the minds of those who look at them. Things in themselves are *not* mutually different. It is the identity perceived by Buddhas that is the real state of things—the very Truth itself.

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"To imagine, therefore, that the man Sakyamuni, of whom we are told that he stood sixteen feet high and possessed the 'thirty-two glorious features,'* was the True Buddha, is entirely false and illusive. *So thought of*, Sakyamuni, so far from being the True Buddha, is no more than a phantasm, an image, a delusion. What, then, *is* the True Buddha? The True Buddha is that Sakyamuni who has been from immemorial times sufficiently enlightened to know the underlying sameness of all things, and the identity of his own person with the external world; he is that Buddha who identifies a pure act of thought with all existences in time and space; he is *that state of mind* in which the Truth and the intellect, the perceiver and the perceived, cease to be two, and are recognized as radically and in essence One. And if this is the case with Sakyamuni, it cannot be otherwise with the people generally. Just as all things in time and space are no more than subjective εἴδωλα in the consciousness of Sakyamuni, so are they in the consciousness of each individual man. Just as Sakyamuni regards all

* Or marks of a Grand Being. See Alabaster's 'Wheel of the Law.'

living beings as his own offspring, so may each individual man do likewise. The Buddha and the people are, in fact, one and the same; there is neither difference nor distinction between them. In the 'Kegon Kyo' it is said that the Mind, the Buddha, and the people are not different from each other, though they have different names and different appearances.

* * * * *

"This world, so full of evils as to appear like a fiery furnace in the eyes of the vulgar, is perceived by the Buddha to be a peaceful and happy realm inhabited by beings of high spiritual order. What is the truth of it? Is the world pure and full of pleasures, or foul and full of pains? The solution will be this or that according to the enlightenment or confusion of each individual mind. The world seen by the Buddha and the world seen by the multitude are not two, but one. When enlightenment is reached, all worlds are seen to be equally glorious and splendid. The first and greatest mission of Sakyamuni in this world is to help the multitude to unfold and develop their Buddha-intellect, and cleanse and purify their nature. When they are once able to unfold this Buddha-intellect of theirs, they will perceive the real nature of this 'world of evils,' that is, the glory of that eternal Reality which underlies the world of outward sense. Hence to proclaim the identity of the evil or phenomenal world with the glorious underlying Reality or noumenon; to point out the way to Buddhahood; to open the

path of salvation; above all, to convince the people that one and all of them may become Buddhas, here and now—this is the mission of the followers of Nichiren."

A few pages further on the Archbishop gives a quotation from the writings of Nichiren himself.

"The doctrines of our sect stand far above those of the other eight sects. They teach us that we can become Buddhas immediately. If one only sees that the Mind, the Buddha, and all living beings, are one and all embodied in his own thought, and are not to be found elsewhere, he can certainly attain to enlightenment in his earthly life, however low his intellect may be. And if the man of low intellect can do so, how much more a man of higher intellectual status? He, surely, need stand in no doubt about the matter. *A fortiori*, then, must this be the case with those whose intellects are of the highest order of all. Since the doctrines taught by Sakyamuni all his life long are those which take the nature of a living being as the basis on which they stand, anyone who understands his own nature is called a Buddha, while those who are unable to do so are justly styled 'the vulgar.'"

The Archbishop then proceeds to comment upon this utterance of the founder's, and in so doing introduces a charming illustration which

will doubtless strike every reader as a Buddhist version of the parable of the Prodigal Son.

"The fact that Nichiren became enlightened proves that even the multitude, in these Last Days of the Great Law, can free themselves from all evils, and reach the self-same goal. Indeed, to attempt to be a Nichiren and a Sakyamuni should be the first motive of all who believe in our doctrines. Man is said by Chinese moralists to be the chief of all living beings in this world, but when a man is engrossed in pursuing his own interests, and cannot live in peace with his neighbours, how can he deserve so high a title? Let us take an illustration: There is one, say, who is entirely ignorant of the Truth. He does not know that in his real nature he is identical with the Buddha of Original Enlightenment, but regards himself as a debased and common person, incapable of instruction —in short, he is such a one as Buddha would call a mendicant. But he was not always thus. He began life as the son of a rich man, to whom he was very dear. Yet he left his good father, and wandered to and fro upon the earth for forty years, during which period his father went to live in a foreign land, so that the prodigal could not rejoin him even when he wanted to, but sank into the direst poverty. But was this poverty, this beggary, his true and original condition? Was it the state proper to a rich man's heir? No; the beggar is but the image of the real man. He is like the Chinese philosopher Chuang-tzŭ when he

dreamt he was a butterfly. The butterfly had only a temporary and subjective existence in the consciousness of the dreamer; it was not Chuang-tzŭ himself, but vanished when he awoke. Our wanderer, however, is still asleep; alas! he is still dreaming that he is a beggar."

* * * * *

"Oh, believers in false doctrines!" exclaims Nichiren, in a passage quoted by the Archbishop in conclusion, "change your beliefs; be converted, and return to the True. You will then find that all the worlds of evils are really the World of Buddha, and the World of Buddha"—that state of mind in which complete enlightenment has been attained—"is not subject to decay; the Land of Jewels"—another name for the same mental condition—"can never disappear. That World is changeless and eternal, the Land imperishable and secure. All enjoy rest and peace, while their minds are lapped in ecstasy."

The book from which the above extracts are taken has been printed in order that it may be sent far and wide over the face of the globe. "The doctrines it sets forth," writes Abbot Kobayashi in the preface, "should not be confined to our own country; they are intended for the enlightenment of all living beings

wherever such may be, in all times and ages, all spheres and realms of life. It is for this reason that the whole world is now given an opportunity of salvation by hearing and embracing the Truth."

WHAT IS GOD?

THIS seems a strange question to ask about a Personality, or Being, whose existence, in some form or other, is almost universally believed in. Nearly every nation, be it civilized or savage, recognizes some unseen Power, which answers more or less closely to what we understand by Deity. In a large number of cases the Supreme Being is regarded as simply the Highest among a multitude of subordinate gods, as in ancient Egypt, Assyria, Rome, and Greece. In China the ultimate object of worship is simply Heaven —a strictly impersonal power, whose symbol in the Chinese written language is composed of 'One' and 'Great.' Among the Aryan races the idea of an 'All Father' has been evolved, the Bright or Shining One; and this appears

unmistakably in Christianity, which represents the Deity as Father, Creator, and Lord. It is with the Christian conception of God that we now propose to deal. What is this conception, to begin with? And how far is it justified by light thrown upon the subject from other sources?

Now the Christian idea, or presentment, of a Supreme Being is, perhaps unavoidably, a very human one. Possibly it could not be otherwise. The highest form of intelligence of which we have any experience is Man, and it is almost insuperably difficult to conceive of any being, however lofty, save as an unspeakably glorious, idealized, and colossal Person. Our mental pictures are simply the reflex of our associations; the moment we attempt to visualize what we call God, the image of a transcendent Man presents itself before us—huge, vague, and splendid, if you will, but still unmistakably a Man; and the conception is encouraged by several of the descriptions of God found in both Old and New Testaments. Take, for instance, the first

chapter of the Book of Job and the fourth and fifth chapters of the Apocalypse. The scenes suggested or described are indeed gorgeously magnificent. In the centre there is a Throne, standing amidst dazzling light, and on the Throne a sublime and mysterious Figure. In front, and all around, we see a gleaming throng of supernatural beings—angels, archangels, cherubim and seraphim, representatives of the innumerable dominions, principalities, and powers which constitute the hierarchy of Heaven. It is the Court of God; the King of kings, the Emperor of the Universe, is holding a levée, at which He receives the reports of His ministers, inquires into their doings, and issues such commands as He may consider necessary. Suddenly a strange form appears in the midst; this is the Adversary, or Accuser, and him God questions in like manner, and gives him his orders accordingly. How solemn and how strange it all is, and yet how very human! Then the scene changes. The Throne is still there, now encircled by a rainbow like an emerald, and on it the wonderful human Figure; but before Him stand a count-

less multitude of worshippers, clothed in white robes, with palms in their hands. To the music of golden harps they sing a song of praise, casting their crowns upon the ground, while from golden censers there rise the fumes of incense, filling the air with odours. It is a cathedral service, ineffably impressive and sublime; but is it actual reality? Will it bear dissection? Those gleaming robes never passed through a loom; those palms grew in no earthly forest; the gold of the harps and the censers was certainly never delved. Did such a scene ever take place, or will it in the far-distant future? Does the Supreme Being sit upon a throne and receive the ritual homage of redeemed souls?

In any case, He did not always do so. There was a time, we are assured, when God was entirely alone. Put back the creative epoch as far as you will, there is always a Past Eternity to be accounted for—a measureless and awful period, compared with which billions on billions of years are as but a moment — when the Almighty had no gleaming throng of worshippers around Him, no angels to do His bidding, no

Courts to hold, no worlds to watch, no events to direct, no one to love or educate or punish, and absolutely nothing to do. It is an inconceivable position; and yet, by the hypothesis, the conclusion is unavoidable, for has not God existed from all eternity, and is not creation, so to speak, the affair of a few years or centuries ago? Say millenniums, if you like; it makes no difference, for if the worlds came into being at a specified point of time, there is still the Eternity which went before. What a terrible idea it seems—the great, lonely God, surrounded by infinite Nothing! What can He have thought about all the time? What should you and I have thought about under like conditions? I fancy we should have wondered how we came there. We should have said to ourselves, "Why am *I* God, instead of someone else? How did I come into existence, and why am I all alone? Did I create myself? Who am I, and how is it that I am what and where I am?"—questions that God alone can answer; and so I suppose He never asked them. Or was He revolving future schemes? Did He lay out His plans for

universes yet to be, arrange the courses of the stars, frame laws for matter yet unborn, and fore-ordain the fates of non-existent creatures? There are some persons, those who talk of God as though He lived in the next street, who would, no doubt, be ready with a confident reply. I believe the prevalent idea is that God spent the Past Eternity in complacent contemplation of His own perfections. This, at any rate, has the advantage of being irrefutable. Guessing would scarcely lead us further.

Then suddenly, and at a certain epoch, God made a move. The first act of creation took place, and angels, or the Sons of God, came into being. These constituted the Court of God, the hierarchy of Heaven, and God was no longer alone. Here again the essentially human character of the conception forces itself upon us, and inevitably the idea occurs to us, "How much more cheerful it must have been!"—for solitude is dreadful to us mortals, driving us first melancholy and then mad. At a subsequent epoch another move was made, resulting in the visible material universe. A burst of light blazed forth

over the black realms of space, while systems and galaxies of suns, satellites, and planets peopled the great emptiness, rolling and spinning in regular courses, and themselves becoming by degrees the seats of sentient and intellectual life. The conclusion, or inference, is obvious. God was not sufficient for Himself. Like Selkirk on his uninhabited island, He needed companionship and occupation. To be undisputed and omnipotent Autocrat over a realm of nothingness, a Ruler with nobody to rule, a King of vacancy and non-existence, was, after all, a dubious privilege, and the worlds of angels and of men were produced to meet His want.

It is difficult to see what other view is open to us so long as we are bound by the conception of God sanctioned by religious orthodoxy. But the question immediately occurs whether religion is the only channel by which any idea of the Supreme Being is obtainable; and the answer to this must be an unhesitating negative. It is impossible for any thoughtful mind to rest in the notion of a quasi-Oriental monarch, a Sultan of the Sky, a personality distinct and apart from

other personalities, to whom every thought and event and word throughout boundless space is conveyed by some occult system of telephonics, and whose dealings with creation are, *magna componere parvis*, analogous to the dealings of a human sovereign with his subjects. What, we may ask, is the Jehovah of the Book of Genesis but a Hebrew Jupiter? And what is the God of popular, unthinking Christianity but a purified and ennobled Jehovah? No; there must be some other avenue which leads to higher and truer conceptions, and we believe it will be found in metaphysics. Now metaphysics is not a homogeneous system like botany or mathematics. There are numberless metaphysical economies, and some of these, as will be shown in the next essay, are unmistakably antitheistic. But a man who wishes to reach a certain point would show small wisdom in turning down a *cul-de-sac* which he knew to be no thoroughfare; and we, therefore, are at least justified in accepting any school of philosophical thought which professes, to say no more, to lead us to the object of our search. The highest forms of metaphysic embrace the

conception of something which answers, in philosophy, to what in religion is called God. And the terms in which that conception is embodied are The Absolute; The Unconditioned; Being, pure and simple; The Universal Noumenon; The Self-existent Power that never began to be; The Ultimate Reality or Fact.

Now, what does the word 'Absolute' mean? According to the acknowledged authorities, its primary signification is unbound, unfettered, subject to no restraint. In metaphysics it conveys the idea of existence independent of any cause outside itself; it is a synonym, in fact, of 'unconditioned'; it also implies self-existence; and it is used to express, not only unrelatedness, but an incapacity for relativity. And yet, incapable of relativity as it is said to be, it is regarded as the ground of all relationship, the foundation of existence and of thought. It is that on which rests every phenomenon in the mental and material worlds, the framework and the source of all things. It is Pure Being. It is that to all other existence which the root of a tree is to the bud—or which the root would be

were it independent of soil and warmth and water. It is that which underlies everything. There was never a time when it did not exist. It is the Ultimate Fact, the Inherent Necessity, that which is because it could not conceivably or possibly *not* be, the great Undeniable as well as the great Inexplicable, the End of all speculation and research, the Mystery of mysteries, the one hypostatic quiddity, the *Ens entium*, the First and Only Cause—Being, in the abstract.

Now, there are two classes of people to whom such a conception as this is eminently distasteful. The first are materialists. They say that there is no scientific proof whatever of anything of the sort, that in Matter, and in Matter only, is to be found the promise and potency of life, and that the Ultimate Fact, as far as research can enlighten us, is the ultimate unit of Matter. An attempt will be made to deal with this objection in the succeeding essay, so we need not dwell further on it here. The second class consists of the great majority of unthinking attendants at church and chapel. It seems to them to reduce the Living God of their adora-

tion to a pale, intangible abstraction—a dry, vague, metaphysical formula that nobody could ever worship. They can understand a God who strolls of an evening with Adam and his wife in a garden, and who is desperately afraid lest a tower should be built so high as to invade His own residence; but a something called The Absolute, Pure Being, The Universal Noumenon —that is ungraspable, as well as uninviting. As well tell them to worship one of Euclid's axioms! They cannot understand such a God as that, much less love and serve Him. In other words, the conception is too high for them, they cannot attain to it; not only does it make the Deity too vague, it places Him out of their reach. And it shows Him as *too wonderful* for them to believe in, much more to understand.

There are, however, two facts, indissolubly associated with this idea of Deity, almost equally ungraspable, in which they already believe: Eternity and Infinity. Future eternity is, of course, conceivable enough. It simply means never-ending duration—'to-morrow, and to-

morrow, and to-morrow.' The succession of phenomena—mental, material, social, political, and what not—is our most familiar experience, and all we have to do in imagining Future Eternity is to imagine such succession going on for ever. There is no difficulty in this; the difficulty would be in conceiving of duration ever coming to an end, for that implies a contradiction in terms. But a Past Eternity! Try and realize that, and the brain swims. It cannot be done. Existence or duration that always was —that never had a beginning—*that* is ungraspable, if you like; and yet it is a fact that cannot be called in question. It is interesting to note the way in which thinkers have tried to grapple with it in past ages down to the present day.

"There was a time," wrote a Chinese philosopher two thousand years ago, "when all things had a beginning. The time when there was yet no beginning had a beginning itself. There was a beginning to the time when the time that had no beginning had not begun. There was existence; there had been no existence. In the time which had no beginning there existed nothing, and nothing existed when

there was as yet no beginning of the time which never began. If suddenly there was nothing, we cannot tell whether it was really anything existing or non-existing."

And Mr. Richard Proctor expresses himself very similarly.

"Those who can," he says, "may find relief in believing in absolutely void space and absolutely unoccupied time before some very remote but not infinitely remote epoch, which may in such belief be called the beginning of all things; but the void time before *that* beginning can have had no beginning, unless it were preceded by time not unoccupied by events, which is inconsistent with the supposition. We find no absolute beginning if we look backwards."

The idea, as I say, is ungraspable; and yet it is true, which shows that not everything that is true is possible to realize, any more than that any irresistible belief is therefore true, for many beliefs which, in times past and under prevailing conditions, have been irresistible, have since turned out entirely false. The point to be noted here is that the conception of a Past Eternity precludes the possibility of any existence during

that epoch *less* than what we have postulated as The Absolute. In popular parlance God is spoken of as infinite; but the popular conception of Him is that of a limited and circumscribed Being, a Person who occupies the central position in a sort of Christianized Olympus, a semi-human Potentate with the attributes and characteristics of a man. Of such a God it is impossible to conceive the lonely, objectless career of solitude during the awful period which was but which never began.

The second fact is Infinity. Here we must divide the subject under two heads—Infinity of Number and Infinity of Space. We need not dwell upon what has already been suggested with regard to the latter. We need only point out—an obvious reflection, it is true—that any theory which holds that space is bounded prompts the question, What is there on the other side of that boundary?—whether it be analogous to a wall on a flat surface, or to the curved surface of a globe. The farthest luminous star that can be detected by our finest telescopes is some thousands of billions

of miles distant from this earth. Now let us draw a line in imagination from where we stand to this most distant star, and let this line represent the radius of a stupendous globe of space, including in it all the heavenly bodies that we can see—a globe the centre of which is the point occupied by ourselves.* Then, after attempting to realize the unrealizable immensity of this space, let us make a still greater effort—the effort to realize that this unrealizable immensity is, when compared with the immensity beyond it, as a single drop of water compared with the Atlantic Ocean. But the unimaginable extent revealed to us by this conception, even if we could grasp it, need not be infinite. In fact, Mr. Karl Pearson assures us that the whole idea of space is a delusion and a snare. There is, he tells us, no such thing. "The farthest star and the page of this book"—meaning p. 188 of 'The Grammar of Science'—"are both for us merely groups of sense-impressions, and the space which separates them is not in them,

* Sir Robert Ball, *passim*.

but is our mode of perceiving them." This explains the whole affair, no doubt, to some people; still, there is an appreciable difference in the sense-impression produced by reaching out one's hand to touch the book one is reading, and attempting to walk a dozen miles, to say nothing of a thousand billion; so that we may leave Mr. Pearson in his imaginary and subjective universe with a clear conscience. Let us seek an answer to our inquiry in the analogy presented by the globe we live on. The world has no partition-boundaries, so that we can walk or sail hither and thither on its surface for ever; but it is bounded by that surface, outside which there is air, ether, and other worlds, from which we judge that, if space be likewise spherical—as has been suggested—it, too, is bounded by its surface; and what is there outside that? Finiteness, then, as attributed to space, is unthinkable; and we are driven to the conclusion that space is infinite. And this, I believe, is true. The finiteness of space is a conception which outrages our intellectual sense—we see it *must* be false; we

have therefore no resource but to adopt the opposite theory, which we see *must* be true, even though it baffles our powers of realization. But as regards number—is number infinite? In the abstract, yes; for however stupendous a figure we can imagine—even beyond our resources of notation—we can always add another numeral to it. But in the concrete the question wears a different aspect. Now, concrete number is best expressed in terms of material molecules, or, better still, atoms, which are, of course, the most numerous things we know of. Let us again for a moment accept Sir Robert Ball as our prolocutor. Matter, he reminds us, consists of molecules, whether solid, liquid, or gaseous; and the capacity of an ordinary thimble contains a multitude of air-molecules that can only be enumerated by billions. Conceive, then, the number of molecules, or combined atoms, which exist, not only in this petty world, but in all the worlds, suns, comets, nebulæ, galaxies, and sidereal systems, which make up the material universe. For we must remember that even in that part of the

universe that is visible to us we can only see the bright stars, and analogy forces upon us the very strong belief that the dark stars we cannot see exceed the bright ones in the proportion of thousands to one. The visible stars alone amount to about a hundred million. Add to these the thousand upon thousand-fold bodies that we cannot see ; add, again, the unimaginable number which lie outside our radius ; reduce all these colossal bodies to their constituent molecules, and then ask, Are *these* infinite? That they are numerous beyond the power of notation or of human thought is obvious ; but are they infinite? Well, there occur to me two answers to that question. Let us ask, first, whether there is room in space for any more material molecules than actually exist. If there is, then the number of molecules now existing is evidently finite, for infinity admits of no addition. And it certainly appears evident that there is room for a most enormous increase. Look at the tremendous gaps which separate star from star—huge deserts of empty space, as void, apparently, as they were before

'creation.' Look, too, at the proportionately still more tremendous gaps which separate molecule from molecule. What is easier than to imagine those interstellar spaces quick with revolving globes, alive with new masses of dense matter? In a word, how could number be infinite unless infinite space itself were one impenetrable and solid block, without the most infinitesimal interstice between its constituent atoms? Clearly, unless we are prepared to prove that this is indeed the fact, we must inevitably deny that numbers, or material units, are infinite. And the mere fact of motion seems to negative the theory, for motion implies displacement, displacement of bodies in a fluid medium, and this is impossible in the absence of a void.

The second answer leads to the same conclusion. Now Catholic theology teaches that God cannot be *infinitely* merciful, and for this reason: God has a store or reservoir of mercy, which is inexhaustible because infinite; therefore, however much mercy He may lavish on human beings, He can never lavish as much as He

possesses — there will always be an infinite remainder; from which we see that the very fact of His resources being infinite renders an infinite amount of expended mercy impossible. In like manner we may argue on the question before us. The Absolute is an infinite reservoir of material potentialities. To whatever extent, therefore, those potentialities are willed or permitted to pass into actualities, an infinite reservoir still remains; and, consequently, no amount of material molecules now existing can be infinite.

This, then, is where we stand. In addition to our conception of The Absolute, we are confronted by the two great facts of eternity of time—that is, beginningless and endless duration—and infinity of space. Further, that The Absolute is Pure Being of infinite potentialities, self-existent and all-embracing, or, in other words, of infinite content. It would seem to follow from this that nothing can exist apart from, or objective to, The Absolute. The idea, therefore, of a solitary God, dwelling amid infinite nothingness, and then, at His own

word of command, being suddenly surrounded by thousands of bounding globes, must give place to something altogether different. The infinite potentialities of such a being as The Absolute must include the potentiality of projection, or materialization; and it seems necessary to believe that—whether voluntarily or of necessity—a certain phase, or element, or integral part of the Divine nature has passed, or is continuously passing, into that particular mode which we only know as Matter. Everything comes from that nature, because there is nothing else for it to come from; everything, rather, is a mode or schesis of that nature itself, for there can be nothing external to a nature of infinite content. Every act we do, every thought we think, must therefore exist subjectively in the Infinite Consciousness, which is coincident with infinite space. This is what is implied by the attributes of omniscience and omnipresence, both of which are thus seen to be necessary conceptions; the error (as it seems to me) of popular religion lying in this: that infinite, necessary, and absolute attributes are

loosely ascribed to a Being of a limited and semi-human character. This is no doubt due in some measure to the exigencies of language, but more, I think, to that ineradicable anthropomorphism which distinguishes the religious notions of the masses. Popularly, God is spoken of as having stamped or imposed certain 'laws' upon the material universe in accordance with His own will. But a moment's thought will show the inadequacy of this conception. What are regarded as so many arbitrary laws are, rather, inherent necessities, intrinsic facts, of the Divine nature, of which the things around us are a projection. That two and two make four, that in a right-angled triangle the square of the hypotenuse is equal to the squares of the subtending sides, are, to put it very roughly, a part of The Absolute, a part of God's own nature—a part, in other words, of God Himself. They are Eternal Truth in exactly the same sense in which He is Eternal Truth, which simply means Eternal Fact. So identical, indeed, are the two conceptions, that it is just as absurd to ask how

'God' came to be as it would be to ask how the fact that 'two and two make four' came to be. The formula 'I am That I am,' or 'I am Because I am' (R.V.), is equally applicable to one as to the other. The question as to what or how many sequences of Nature are to be included in this category is a thing apart, and not indispensable to our argument. Gravitation as expressed in the 'law' that bodies attract each other in the direct ratio of their masses, and in the inverse ratio of the square of their distances, may be an eternal and necessary fact, or it may be a secondary and contingent fact, necessary only under certain conditions of Matter. But whichever it is, the truth remains that, given such conditions as we are aware of, nothing could be different from what it is. If gravitation were seen in any case to be apparently suspended, that would mean no infraction of the so-called law itself, but simply the manifestation of some other law with which we are not familiar, an event which is perfectly conceivable. But it is not conceivable that two and two should make anything else

than four under any conditions whatever; *that* is a fact which is as much a part of the nature of The Absolute as those moral qualities, such as justice, purity, and love, ascribed to the Divine Being, or the equally necessary fact that one act of sin involves a deterioration of character on the part of the sinner. All are integral parts of the nature of things-in-themselves, of the Eternal Fact behind which we cannot go—of The Absolute, or God.

The same thought seems to have struck a certain philosopher in the Far East in the second century B.C.—a man who belonged to a school of metaphysics that, some believe, found its way to China from India seven hundred years (or more) before. In the following extracts I purposely leave untranslated the word which is the keynote of the system:

"Now *x* is that which covers Heaven and supports Earth; it is co-extensive with the four quarters, and spreads to the eight points; its height cannot be measured nor its depth fathomed; it enfolds the universe in its embrace, and confers visibility on that which at first was formless.

"It fills all within the four points of the compass;

it contains the Two Principles of Being" [the Male and Female]; "it holds together Space and Time . . . and is so tenuous and subtle that it pervades everything as water pervades earth in mire. It is by x that mountains are high and abysses deep; that beasts walk and birds fly; that the sun and moon are bright, and the stars revolve in their courses.

"Therefore it is that the sky revolves and the earth is motionless; that circumvolution goes on unceasingly and that water flows continuously; for x is the beginning and the end of the visible creation. The rising of wind, the gathering of clouds—both are *necessities;* the rumbling of thunder, and the fall of rain, alike *must be*, and that without end.

"Now Formlessness is the first progenitor of Form, and Silence is the ancestor of Sound. . . . And what is this Formlessness? It is the One. And what is this One? It is that which has no equal under heaven; which, though it stands unsupported and alone, motionless and isolated, permeates all above and all below; . . . it is the Door of Nature! Majestic in its breadth and depth, invisible and without form, it alone preserves its virtue (δυναμις) absolutely pure, spreading and diffusing it without exhaustion, exercising it without fatigue. Wherefore it is invisible, though looked for; inaudible, though listened for; intangible, though sought for; formless, yet giving birth to forms; soundless, yet causing harmony; tasteless, yet producing flavours; colourless, yet perfecting every tint. Thus existence is produced from

non-existence, and reality from vacancy. The world being its only enclosure, the nominal and the actual exist together.

"Given x, the universe comes into existence."

Surely this unknown and mysterious entity, this Formless x, is no other than The Absolute, recognized by all writers of the Taoist philosophy in China as the source and noumenon of all phenomenal being. Quotations might be multiplied, but the above are sufficient for our purpose.

As we write, we have lighted upon a passage in one of M. Camille Flammarion's astronomical romances which expresses in terse and forcible language what we have already striven to inculcate upon this great subject.

"God," says the French astronomer, "is no more in any part of Heaven than on Earth—or, more accurately, He is nowhere more visible than here. There is not anywhere in infinity a certain place with pavements of pearl, on which stands the throne of the Most High. . . . To see God face to face is an expression purely symbolic. The eyes of the most glorified, most angelic body, could not see or admire anywhere that invisible Person. Heaven has no existence. Astronomical space is infinite. God

is a pure spirit, or rather *the* pure Spirit, conscious of itself, and of every infinitesimal part of the Universe; personal, but without form; . . . as active in the operations of terrestrial Nature as in the sublime manifestations of the higher spiritual spheres.

"The Infinite Being—Cause of causes, Principle of all that is, virtue and support of the universe, absolute, eternal—is, moreover, wholly incomprehensible by you, and me, and all creatures. His existence is indisputable, for without it it would be impossible to explain the existence of intelligence in the creation, of mathematics (which man did not invent, but discovered), and of intellectual and moral truths. But the Author and Supreme Judge of all things is above our conception. . . . Efforts to comprehend the intrinsic nature and mode of action of the Infinite Being would be labour utterly in vain."

We have argued that The Absolute is the Ultimate Fact, behind which we cannot go; that Its existence is the source and the explanation of everything; that the so-called laws of Nature are simply the manifestation of It in visibility; and that, therefore, there cannot be anything *super* natural. How, then, about Miracle? For in attempting to replace the anthropomorphism of much popular Christianity

by a higher and truer conception it is far indeed from our purpose to throw doubt on Christianity itself. This is a question, then, of considerable importance, and a few words upon it are necessary from the standpoint we have taken up.

We will be as concise as possible. For the purposes of our argument there are, hypothetically, two sorts of miracle: absolute and relative. The former, which is imagined only by very thoughtless and uncultured persons, is by its very nature impossible—impossible because, as we shall show, it involves a logical absurdity, a contradiction in terms. Now there are two propositions which, in a somewhat fluid state, exist in the minds of the unthinking. One is that the Ultimate Fact of the Universe is the will of God; the other, that Omnipotence can do 'anything.' But it should be clear to anybody who weighs the question for a moment that the will of God is an ultimate fact only in relation to that which is effected or affected by it—not as regards God Himself; seeing that will is only the expression of one's nature, and

that therefore the nature of God, who is invariable, is the Ultimate Fact with which we have to deal. It is, therefore, not an irreverent statement, but a metaphysical truth, that God cannot transgress the 'law'—if we may, for convenience' sake, use such a term—of His own nature; and, this 'law' being permanent, as well as the *ultima Thule* of our profoundest investigations, it is this which determines the will, and is in itself an eternal and unchanging fact. Similarly, to say that 'God can do anything'—in other words, that He can perform 'absolute' miracle—is not only to affirm that which would involve a variation in the Invariable and the existence of something behind the Ultimate; it is to be guilty of a contradiction in terms. It would be an 'absolute' miracle if two and two were made to equal five; if a triangle were described that should be neither equilateral, isosceles, nor scalene; if the same thing were to occupy two or more different places at the same time; or if a man were to jump down his own throat. Such, however, are the absurdities ascribed to Omnipotence by

persons who thoughtlessly and irrationally employ the formula that we have quoted; and we can only say that, if their notion of Omnipotence is the correct one, there is no such thing as Omnipotence in existence. We are reminded here of the clever catch with which mischievous persons are sometimes prone to puzzle the unwary. What would happen, one is asked, if an irresistible force were brought to bear upon an immovable object? A tremendous problem, truly. Would they both be annihilated? Would the Universe come to an end? Or would the result be *nil?* Of course nothing would happen, because the proposition itself is nonsense. Given the existence of an irresistible force, there can be no such thing as an immovable object; for, if there were, no force could be irresistible. The two terms of the proposition are mutually exclusive; and so with 'absolute' miracle.

But there is no such difficulty in connection with the miracle we have called 'relative.' On the contrary, 'relative' miracle is one of the commonplaces of our daily experience. Here

we are on firm ground; if we may be allowed a somewhat palpable pun, on the firmest concrete. The sudden transformation, by means of a refrigerating-machine, of a pint of water into a solid block is a real miracle in the eyes of a tropical savage—as much so as walking on the water is to us. Had our great-grandfathers been told that in a few years a man in London would be able to converse *vivâ voce* with a man in New York, they would have declared such a thing to be as miraculous as the floating of an iron hatchet or the blossoming of Aaron's wand, and would naturally have declined to believe it. It is clear, then, that what is a miracle to an untutored savage is an ordinary process to a man of average education; that what is a miracle to the wisest and most ingenious inventor would be simple enough to higher and more enlightened intelligences; and that nothing which does not involve a contradiction in terms can possibly be miraculous to the Supreme Intelligence of all.

One of the best-known definitions of Miracle is that by St. Thomas Aquinas. "Those events

alone," wrote the Angelic—or is it Seraphic?—Doctor, "are properly termed miracles which, not being in the ordinary course of Nature, are brought about by Divine providence." A more unsatisfactory utterance could scarcely be conceived. Far better is that suggested by Dr. Matheson, who defines it as the initial stage of that process by which a lower 'law' is transcended by a higher. In lifting one's foot from the ground, for instance, there is no interference, strictly speaking, with the original law—the law of gravitation—which is still left in possession of the material sphere. What has happened is that "an element once included in that sphere has been lifted into a higher one; the principle of mind or vitality has been stronger than the original form of the law. This is not a miracle to me," continues Matheson, "because I am already in natural possession of the power by which it is done. But it would be a miracle to a being who did not possess that power—as such a miracle as walking on the water is to us. We now look on walking upon the ground as a perfectly natural occur-

rence, but that is simply because the initial stage of the process is past. The law which was once transcendental has become normal and natural. Is there anything absurd in the notion that if our mental development were complete we should find the process of walking on the sea to be as reconcilable with science as that of walking on the land?"

It is interesting to find these views shared and expressed by no less an authority than the late Professor Huxley.

"There are impossibilities logical, but none natural," he says. "I am unaware of anything that has a right to the title of an 'impossibility,' except a contradiction in terms. A round square, a present past, two parallel lines that intersect, are contradictory of the ideas denoted by the subjects square, past, and parallel. But walking on the water, or turning water into wine, or procreation without male intervention, or raising the dead, are plainly not 'impossibilities' in this sense. In the affirmation that a man walked upon the water, the idea of the subject is not contradictory of that in the predicate. Naturalists are familiar with insects that walk upon water, and imagination has no more difficulty in putting a man in place of the insect than it has in giving a man some of the attributes of the bird and making an

angel of him; or in ascribing to him the ascensive tendencies of a balloon, as the levitationists do. Undoubtedly there are very strong physical and biological arguments for thinking it extremely improbable that a man could be supported on the surface of the water as an insect is, or that his organization could be compatible with the possession and use of wings, or that he could rise through the air without mechanical aid. But it is sufficiently obvious, not only that we are at the beginning of our knowledge of Nature, instead of having arrived at the end of it, but that the limitations of our faculties are such that *we never can be in a position to set bounds to the possibilities of Nature.* The change of water into wine undoubtedly implies a contradiction, and is assuredly impossible, if we are permitted to assume that the 'elementary bodies' of the chemists are now and for ever immutable. Not only, however, is a negative proposition of this kind incapable of proof, but *modern chemistry is inclining towards the contrary doctrine.* And if carbon can be got out of oxygen or hydrogen, the conversion of water into wine comes within range of scientific possibility—it becomes a mere question of molecular arrangement. As for virgin procreation, it is not only clearly imaginable, but modern biology recognises it as an everyday occurrence among some groups of animals. And so with restoration to life after death."

The importance of these utterances, coming from such a man as the late Professor Huxley,

can scarcely be over-estimated. That the italics are my own does not impair the enormous value of Huxley's deliberate opinion. Here, then, we have, on the highest scientific authority, an assurance that there is nothing scientifically impossible in a considerable number of the miracles recorded in the Bible; and we have, too, an invaluable criterion by which the possibility of such miracles may be gauged. In the first place, we have to consider whether a given miracle involves a contradiction in terms; in other words, whether it involves a breach of some necessary and absolute truth. If it does, it must be rejected at once, and that without hesitation. If, on the other hand, it involves the breach only of some empirically observed sequence, however unusual, we are debarred from pronouncing it impossible. Then, of course, every such alleged miracle must be examined on its merits. Legitimate tests in this case will, of course, suggest themselves to everybody. In dealing with miracles ascribed to Divine agency, the moral test naturally stands first. Take, for instance, the Cursing

of the Fig-tree. The influence of will on force, and of force on matter, forbids us on such grounds to condemn the feat as impossible. It is the moral consideration that stands in our way here. For consider. Christ is represented, first, as so utterly ignorant of common everyday facts as to expect a tree to be bearing fruit out of its season. The first peasant He met on the road could have told Him better; and Christ had spent thirty years in country life. Then, irritated at not finding figs when there were not, and could not be, any figs in Palestine, He curses the tree, and forbids it to bear fruit any more. That is to say, He is represented as punishing an inanimate object for not performing a miracle; and the occurrence is still more outrageous when we remember that, by the orthodox creed itself, Christ was Himself the Creator of the world, who had endowed the world with all its material laws and properties; so that He cursed the tree for not having miraculously infringed His own laws. Now suppose that this story had appeared in the Koran instead of in the Bible. Suppose we had been told that Mohammed,

when one day in the desert, felt hungry, saw a date-palm, went up to it expecting to find some dates on it out of season, and then cursed it to such good effect that presently the palm-tree withered away, would not every pious Christian, on reading such a story, exclaim, "How like a false prophet! And how *unlike* Christ!"? Of course; and therefore we pay greater honour to Christ Himself in rejecting the story altogether than in trying to explain it away. Other miracles, again, present difficulties of another nature. While we may deny that walking on the water, or healing the sick by a word, or raising the dead, involves any breach of the unchangeable nature of The Absolute, we are puzzled what account to give of certain alleged occurrences which seem to hover on the very verge of the two sharply-defined spheres. Take the three miracles—one in the Old Testament and two in the New—of the multiplication of bread. Now, bread is a manufactured article. It is made in the form of a loaf, which consists of crust and crumb—different in both colour and consistency. A loaf has a

certain shape; it bears external marks of the oven in which it was baked, and it is a little burnt, perhaps, in one corner. It is, therefore, difficult to realize the reproduction, or multiplication, or, in other words, creation out of nothing, of an object bearing all these marks of human, artificial manufacture. The same may be said of the handkerchiefs and aprons that miraculously 'came from' the dress or person of St. Paul, woven, I suppose, as such things are, made of linen or cotton, and bearing the marks of the loom. Who wove them, and where was the material grown?

So much by way of illustration. It is not necessary for our purpose to enter upon a fuller examination of recorded miracles, which, indeed, everyone can do for himself. The point I want to emphasize is, that the possibility of miracles may be safely admitted without involving any breach whatever of the unity of Nature, the invariability of the One Absolute, in whom and from whom and by whom are all things. The healing of disease by a word, a look, a touch, or an effort of will, is simply a striking instance of

that wonderful influence of mind upon matter which is now universally acknowledged if only partially understood. And if the influence of mind upon matter is a mystery and yet a fact, so is the influence of matter itself upon matter. What is a surer fact in the whole range of physical nature than that a pull exists between the globe on which we live and the sun; between the sun and Sirius; between all the countless suns and planets that swing in equilibrium throughout space? And what is a profounder mystery? Why do these bodies attract each other? How do they do it? What is the mechanism at work, and where shall we look for it? To these questions there is at present no reply; and yet the mystery is a fact. No truer illustration of Miracle could be afforded than the 'law' of gravitation; for, after all, the best definition of the word itself is to be found by simply turning it into another language, and calling it a Wonder.

It only remains for us now to revert to the objection alluded to on an earlier page. Why, it may be asked, must we hypothesize an

unrealizable metaphysical entity, called 'The Absolute,' as the Ultimate Fact in Nature? Why not recognize that Ultimate Fact in the ultimate unit of matter—a thing that we know to exist, and behind which no science can possibly go? The question is a very important one, and deserves careful consideration. In the present essay we have argued deductively from The Absolute to the visible Universe. We will now attempt the inductive method, and see whether our theory of The Absolute cannot be substantiated by an appeal to physical science

CAN GOD BE PROVED?

For the man who has eyes to see and ears to hear there are signs, numerous and unmistakable, that that tissue of misunderstandings, cross-purposes, and confused thought, called the Conflict between Religion and Science, is surely, if gradually, disappearing. Controversialists are beginning to realize the truth that extreme, unpliable views betoken weakness rather than strength, that the precise significance attaching to ascertained facts is not always recognizable at a glance, that the most highly authorized interpretations are not necessarily above revision, and that an open mind is an excellent thing in the discussion of weighty themes. Concessions have, then, been made on both sides, and it would seem that to Religion belongs the honour of

having evacuated the greater number of positions. This, in a sense, she was in justice bound to do. The rack, the thumbscrew, and the stake—all favourite arguments of Holy Church in her palmy days against metaphysical misdemeanour—required at least some sort of *amende honorable*; and Science, never disposed to adopt similar methods of persuasion in proof of the Copernican system or the theory of Evolution, accepts all such surrenders as her best and most desirable revenge. She, on her side, as expounded by her foremost representatives, no longer occupies the contemptuous and aggressive attitude towards Religion which, in the insolence of her new-born strength, she once assumed; mutual forbearance has paved the way for mutual understanding and respect; Darwinianism is now accepted by Catholic and Protestant theologians of unblemished orthodoxy, and Professor Huxley defends the possibility of miracles in the pages of the *Agnostic Annual*.

To say that whatever is is right is to talk nonsense; to say that whatever is right will be

is to speak words of truth and soberness. Now, the range of human thought may be said, for our present purpose, to extend over three great spheres — Religion, Philosophy, and Science. Explain the Universe as you may, it is impossible to deny its Unity; the same laws which govern matter on this Earth prevail in our neighbours of the Solar System, and are recognizable in their operation from Alpha Centauri to those abysmal depths of space which lie beyond the reach of our finest instruments. Everything that we call Objective Reality—idealistic conceptions, for the nonce, being left aside—is One, and comes from a single source. No one, be he Christian or materialist, will probably dispute that. It follows therefore that between true Religion, true Philosophy, and true Science, there cannot, in the nature of things, be any conflict, each must agree with the others in all points where they touch; to suppose otherwise is to represent the Universe as at variance with itself, to be guilty of a contradiction in terms as glaring as the hypothesis of an immovable object co-existing with an irresistible force. It

is, in fact, only by virtue of this self-consistency in Nature that we are enabled to interpret phenomena at all, interpretation implying an intelligent something capable of being explained; and the discovery of order, regularity, and meaning in the phenomena we are studying, be they mental or material, shows that we are on the right road so far. Our calculations, as far as we have gone, are satisfactory, *but not final*; to obtain the grand result, to test the correctness of our figures, we must compare them with the results of research in other departments, for if there is any lack of harmony or adjustment between the two, we may be sure there is a mistake somewhere. Objective harmony there must be, and if, as we believe, the 'right' will eventually prevail, that harmony is discoverable; any discrepancy, however slight, reveals the presence of error, and bids us revise our inferences. One branch of investigation thus acts as a check upon our conclusions in another branch, and furnishes a test of truth. If, for instance, we find that a certain sociological law which we think we have established conflicts with a psycho-

logical law which has hitherto held the field, it is clear that one of the two must be wrong; each one, brought to the test of the other, is placed, so to speak, upon its trial, and the fitter of the two survives.

The application of this theory to Religion is clear. For a long, long time, while Science and Philosophy were in their cradles, Religion had it all her own way. Her dicta were authoritative, unquestionable, final. When Religion said, "Death came into the world through sin," or "The Universe was created in six days six thousand years ago, being manufactured in much the same way as that in which a mechanician makes a watch," there was no one to deny it, and Archbishop Ussher's addition sum was accepted as a revelation from God. But the time came when Science began to doubt. Judge Goodwin's moderate, almost timid, article on 'The Mosaic Cosmogony' in *Essays and Reviews* threw the religious world into a paroxysm of indignant horror, which rose almost into frenzy when the evolutionary theories, popularized by Mr. Darwin, threatened

the mechanical or 'carpenter' hypothesis, which formed one of the bulwarks of orthodox Christianity. The first crash of the tempest over, a very remarkable change took place. Religion shifted her position. Up till then, whenever she was confronted by a new fact in geology or biology, she had brought that fact to the bar of Genesis; if it accorded with what was written there, it was allowed to pass; if not, so much the worse for the fact. But now the process was reversed; the pleader and the judge changed places. Instead of the new discovery being tested by the Book of Genesis, the resources of hermeneutics were exhausted to make Genesis support the new discovery. This was a great surrender, and its effects have been enormous. Sometimes the rival theories were found entirely incompatible, and fresh retreats took place. But, paradoxical as it may appear, all this contributed to the strength, rather than to the weakness, of true Religion. Like David, she was constrained to put off the heavy armour —the armour which did not properly belong to her—as over-weighting her in the conflict with

her foe, and, freed from its embarrassments, came to see that her real strength lay elsewhere.

But it is not always that Religion achieves victories under the disguise of a defeat. The *truths* she embodies are in every instance confirmed and supported by Philosophy and Science —nay, they always must be, by the very hypothesis that they *are* truths. Take, by way of illustration, her solemn utterance upon the automatizing effects of persistence in habit, particularly in habits of vice. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then shall they do well who are accustomed to do evil." "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Here we are in the region of Ethics. Are these utterances true? Are they justified by the highest psychological thought? Are they in accord with physiology? Surely, yes. Let us hear what Dr. Bain has to say upon the subject. Dealing with the phenomenon of sudden conversions—regarding the *possibility* of which he is at one with Religion; it is only the enormous *difficulty* of such a change that the Bible emphasizes—he says:

"The explanation is no doubt to be sought in some overpowering impression upon the mind that supplies a new energetic motive to the will, thereby initiating a new line of conduct. If we can only strike a blow with such power as to seize possession of a man's entire thoughts and voluntary dispositions for a certain length of time, we may succeed in launching him in a new career, and in keeping him in that course, until there be time for new habits to commence, and until a force is arrayed in favour of the present state of things, able to cope with the tendencies and growth of the former life. Such changes occasionally happen, *but not without terrific struggles, which prove how hard it is to set up the volitions of a day against the bent of years*" (see his 'Emotions and the Will,' pp. 453, 454).

"Thoughts," he says again, in his work on 'The Senses and the Intellect,' "persist by a law *which is not subject to the will*, and not only persist, but interfere with the course of our actions and the pursuit of our interests" (p. 345).

"The physiological study of mental conditions," writes Professor James in his 'Principles of Psychology,' "is the most powerful ally of hortatory ethics. The hell to be endured hereafter of which theology tells is no worse than the hell we make for ourselves in this world by habitually fashioning our characters in the wrong way. Could the young but realize how soon they would become mere walking bundles of habits, they would give more heed to their conduct

while in the plastic state. We are spinning our own fates, good or evil, and never to be undone. Every smallest stroke of virtue or of vice leaves its never so little scar. The drunken Rip Van Winkle, in Jefferson's play, excuses himself for every fresh dereliction by saying, 'I won't count it this time.' Well, he may not count it, and a kind Heaven may not count it, but it is being counted none the less. Down among his nerve-cells and fibres the molecules are counting it, registering it and storing it up, to be used against him when the next temptation comes. Nothing we ever do is, in strict literalness, wiped out" (vol. i., p. 127).

"Habit a second nature? Habit is ten times nature," said that keen judge of men, the Duke of Wellington.

"The study of psychology," remarks Dr. Carpenter in his 'Mental Physiology,' "has evolved no more certain result than that there are uniformities of mental action which are so entirely conformable to those of bodily action as to indicate their intimate relation to a 'mechanism of thought and feeling,' acting under the like conditions with that of sense and motion. The psychical principles of *association*, indeed, and the physiological principles of *nutrition*, simply express—the former in terms of mind, the latter in terms of brain—the universally admitted fact that any sequence of mental action which has been fre-

quently repeated tends to perpetuate itself; so that we find ourselves automatically prompted to *think*, *feel*, and *do* what we have been before accustomed to think, feel, and do under like circumstances. . . . It scarcely, indeed, admits of doubt that every state of ideational consciousness which is either *very strong* or *habitually repeated* leaves an organic impression upon the cerebrum;" and "when the organic modification has been once *fixed* in the growing brain, it becomes part of the normal fabric, and is regularly *maintained* by nutritive substitution; so that it may endure to the end of life, like the scar of a wound."

The same view is supported by Dr. Maudsley in his 'Physiology of Mind,' and may thus be considered as forming part of the most advanced psychical and physiological thought of our day. What more can Religion ask? Her vindication here is complete, for her dictum is endorsed by the highest independent authority as true to the facts of Science.

The support afforded by Science, and, indeed, common experience, to the second passage above quoted—a passage which repeats the same truth in different words—is too obvious to need more proof than that already given. And yet how frequently is *one* application of that truth for-

gotten! It seems difficult for some persons to realize that spiritual seed, for instance, can only produce a spiritual harvest, and that it is as unreasonable to expect any other result as it would be to sow a field with barley and then pray for a crop of potatoes. It is by no means unusual to meet with those who, on the ground that they are pious and God-fearing, anticipate immunity amid an epidemic of cholera or typhoid fever. Having sown spiritually, they hope to reap hygienically, forgetful of the law that *what* they sow *that*, and that only, can they reap; that if they wish to reap hygienically they must obey the laws of hygiene by seeing to the source of their milk and water supply, and the flushing of their drains and sinks, no amount of spirituality being of avail to counteract the poisons of sewer-gas or the ravages of microbes and bacilli. The man who breaks a law suffers the penalty of that law, and not of another; and in this there is no respect of persons.

Again, it is said that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years

as one day. At first sight it may well appear that this simply means that, to a Being who never began and who will never end, the difference between one day and three hundred and sixty-five thousand days shrinks into insignificance. But it may also be regarded as a theological statement of the metaphysical theory that time, being no more than a form of our own finite sensibility, has no objective existence, and that to the Supreme Intelligence there is no time—nothing but an Eternal Now.

All this, however, is by way of illustration merely. The points in which Religion receives support from true Science and true Philosophy are far more numerous and important than many of its adversaries suppose. The fact that a religious truth appears under another name in other branches of thought is inevitable, for the simple reason that every subject has a terminology of its own. The religious conception of Conscience, for example, may be psychologically corroborated by the theory of Inhibitions, inherited instincts on the side of right, the existence of which is accounted for

with much elaborate detail by the expert in anthropology. Original Sin, again, is a fact; Science teaches us that it is nothing but the Brute-Inheritance which lingers in each of us—the greed, the selfishness, the sensuality, the fighting instinct, all those purely animal impulses and appetites which are being gradually, as is hoped, weakened and destroyed in the upward evolution of humanity. Similar instances might be collected in abundance, as everyone who has thought or read anything about the subject knows well enough; while, on the other hand, there are many propositions presented to us on the authority of Religion, in regard to which Science either says, "I have nothing to do with such matters—they do not come within my purview," or else, "My researches have not yet been pursued far enough to justify an authoritative verdict." In either case the position of Religion is independent, and, so far, unassailable. As we have already seen, there are other points on which the assertions of Religion have been emphatically contradicted by the results of scientific investigation;

and of these she has dropped some, and simply reiterated others, without producing any fresh evidence in their favour.

Let us now come to the point. The great doctrine on which Religion is based—the doctrine without which the very word 'Religion' would have no meaning for us, the doctrine which informs and saturates every phase and outcome of the religious ideal—is the existence of a Supreme Being. This is the foundation, the corner-stone, of Religion in every shape. The importance of the question, then, "Do Philosophy and Science, on their side, corroborate the contention of Religion in this vital matter, or do they not?" can scarcely be overstated, and we may well devote a few pages to considering it.

The name by which the Supreme Being is known in the language of Religion is God. Of this word more than one explanation has been given. For some time it was believed to be etymologically identical with 'good.' It would not have been strange had such been the case, considering the corruption into which the latter

word has fallen in the common proverb, "Cleanliness is next to goodliness"—*i.e.*, if you are not comely in appearance, you may, at any rate, be clean, which is the next best thing. But the word 'God' has nothing whatever to do with 'good,' according to the best authorities. A likelier derivation which has been suggested is from the Persian *kodhâ*, and yet another from the Sanscrit *gûdha*, which means mystery; but for these, I think, historical evidence is wanting. Professor Müller's notion that it is a corruption of Woden, sometimes written Goden, the name of the Scandinavian Storm-spirit from which we derive our word 'Wednesday'—the interchange of *g* and *w* being in strict accordance with Grimm's Law, as 'guard' and 'ward,' 'Guillaume' and 'William'—though a little startling, has, at any rate, the merit of originality and the support of precedent.* The point, however, has only an academic interest. Suffice it to say that Religion represents the Supreme Being as personal—even as having a name; for the Jews, at any rate, worshipped Him under the

* See Fiske's 'Idea of God,' Appendix.

name of Jah or Jahveh, and spoke, besides, of the 'Ineffable Name' which, though communicable under certain elaborate conditions unnecessary to refer to here, was too sacred to be uttered. The Supreme Being is likewise the Creator of All Things, having existed from all eternity by virtue of His own inherent intrinsicality, and, at a certain point in duration, produced the visible Universe by the forthcoming of His sovereign will. So far, there is nothing in the conception that is not sublime and pure. Infinite holiness, infinite wisdom, infinite benevolence, and infinite power, are further ascribed to the Supreme Being; we are told that when He had finished creating, and contemplated the result, He pronounced it "very good," and that ever since His "tender mercies" have been "over all His works." Personality, here, is of course evident; there is even a savour of anthropomorphism, which, so far, is by no means to be censured. The Supreme Being is represented as outside created Nature, and as being actuated by the utmost benevolence toward it. All creatures are under

His personal care, and not even a sparrow falls to the ground unnoticed. That is the general, the comprehensive, the expansive, view of the Supreme Being, who is always and necessarily actuated by infinite holiness, benevolence, and wisdom. But when we come to details, we are instantly confronted by the most startling inconsistencies. The crown and climax of the Creator's work turns out a disastrous failure. Man, created in His own image, breaks down utterly the very moment his moral mettle is put to the test. He disobeys the first command laid upon him, whereupon the Supreme Being curses the ground for his sake, and condemns all future women to torture in propagating their offspring on the ground that the first woman ate an apple, or some other fruit, when she was told not to. He 'repents' having made man at all,* and destroys the majority, yet continues to produce generation after generation of fallen beings. From this point forward, the religious presentment of the Supreme Being declines in majesty. He develops into a Jealous God,

* Gen. vi. 6, 7.

whose name is Jealous; He vacillates, being only turned from some act of impulsive injustice by the stern expostulations of one of His own creatures;* He commands one king to slaughter women and children, infants and sucklings, in cold blood;† He instigates another to commit sin‡ over and over again, and then visits, not only the king himself, but millions of innocent people, with a series of ridiculous and ghastly plagues, crowned by the death of all their eldest children—think of that, fathers and mothers! —for a sin prompted by Himself, and committed by someone over whose actions they had no control; causes the Israelites, by way of punishment, to pass their children through the fire, giving them bad statutes and judgments, whereby they should not live;§ performs a stupendous miracle to prove to an insignificant personage in Syria that a poultice is a good thing for a boil;‖ orders one prophet to marry a strumpet,¶ and another to commit the very

* Gen. xviii. 25.

† 1 Sam. xv. 3. Compare ver. 11 with ver. 29.

‡ Exod. iv. 21.

§ Ezek. xx. 25, 26.

‖ Isa. xxxviii., *passim*.

¶ Hos. i. 2, 3.

foulest and most disgusting act known to humanity, and then only among a certain class of the insane;* and—if we are to accept as authoritative the dictum of the sternest logicians Religion has ever produced—brings the infinitely larger proportion of the human race into existence under the prenatal sentence of being kept alive, to all eternity, in torments so hideous, so agonizing, so awful, as to be indescribable in human language.† In these developments, of course, anthropomorphism degenerates into diabolomorphism; and yet Religion, even in our own day, sanctions, or has sanctioned, them all, the last only being repudiated by those teachers who, regarding as canonical all the passages which assert the former, sacrifice their consistency to their sense of right. This constitutes a *part* of the religious conception of the Supreme Being. Of course, there is another side to it. We are told of the Lord, the Lord merciful and

* Ezek. iv. 12, 15.

† Calvin and Jonathan Edwards, *passim;* Tertullian; and Article XVII. in the Prayer-Book.

gracious, the forgiver of sins, the healer of disease, the 'Lover of Souls,' the God who will have all men to be saved, the Father whose love for His children is invincible and inexhaustible. But to dwell upon this side of religious teaching is simply to throw into the strongest possible relief the irreconcilable inconsistency between the two views. Religion has attempted that reconciliation, not by denying facts—for, as we have seen, she herself teaches them—but by placing them in a distorted light, by resorting to forced and unnatural interpretations—even by the fatal argument that the word 'good' when applied to Deity may mean something entirely different from what it means when applied to man. This, of course, is as much as to say that the Supreme Being is unknowable, and that He may be what *we* call 'bad.' It upsets, if not reverses, all our notions of right and wrong; it at once suggests the question, "If a frantic ogre, who commands the slaughter of innocent little babies and unoffending live-stock, is an embodiment of Divine Goodness, must we not conclude that the so-

called goodness of a Father whose tender mercies are over all His works is really and essentially Badness? And if 'good,' when applied to the Supreme Being, may mean what we understand by evil, may not what we have been taught to regard as evil, vice, or sin, be really and essentially good?"—a point we are content to leave for apologists of the Mansel school of orthodoxy to decide, for the enlightenment of humanity at large.

But now, retiring to a judicious distance from these curiously-conflicting details, let us view the religious conception of the Supreme Being as a homogeneous whole. According to Matthew Arnold, that conception is of 'a sort of clergyman, a sort of schoolmaster'—the head of the clerical interest. Let us describe it as that of Supreme Hierophant of Religion—the prototype of a Pope or Archbishop, concerning Himself exclusively with the religious interest, the religious view of matters generally; but it is clear that the Supreme Being can scarcely be so limited. A Being who is Supreme, who is the author of everything—mental and material—must be

equally supreme in the philosophical and scientific spheres. He must occupy, towards Spencerianism, Hegelianism, Darwinism, Schopenhauerism, and the hundred other systems of scientific and philosophic speculation, precisely the same position as He occupies towards Catholicism, Anglicanism, Wesleyanism, Plymouth Brethrenism, Socinianism, and all other systems of religious speculation. The God of Religion must be also the God of Philosophy and the God of Science. The Author of all thought cannot be divorced from any system or school of thought. The Author of Nature cannot be divorced from any attempt to explain or understand Nature. He is as much and as truly present in the problems of the higher algebra as He is in the problems of scholastic theology and the spiritual experiences of every individual soul. A Being who is at once the source and the embodiment of Universal Truth, must have a complete instinctive knowledge of every department of Truth, whether it be the infinitesimal calculus, the theory of probabilities and chances, the problems of

mathematical physics, the intricacies of qualitative and quantitative analysis, Taylor's Theorem, the properties of curves and angles, or the results of abstract thought. Religion seems scarcely conscious of the admission it makes in describing the Supreme Being as God over All; but *given* a Supreme Being—without which Religion itself could not exist—and by the very terms of His designation He cannot be confined to that realm of thought which makes the foremost claim for His existence.

Let us, then, see what Philosophy and Science have to say to this great doctrine. Religion affirms the existence of a Supreme Being, and proceeds to tell us something about His attributes. Do Philosophy and Science support her? And, if so, to what extent?

Philosophy—using the word in the sense of metaphysical speculation — is many-tongued. Instinctively we think of Hegel and Kant, Schopenhauer and Hartmann, Leibnitz and Lotze, Spinoza, Descartes, and Locke. To which shall we turn? There is abundant choice; a Supreme Being of some sort is to

be found among them, though under strange disguises. Von Hartmann tells us of 'The Unconscious,' which in only the most strained and non-natural sense can be recognized as a metaphysical equivalent of 'The Divine,' for it involves the paradox that consciousness may spring from an unconscious cause, the rational and intelligible from that which is irrational and unintelligent. The phrase 'unconscious intelligence' is surely self-destructive, as much so as 'impersonal reason.' To all intents and purposes his system is no more than a phase, a mode, of the frank atheism of his more famous master. Schopenhauer believes neither in the existence of a Supreme Being nor in that of a metaphysical First Cause. He denies the validity and applicability of the principle of causation outside the physical world. That principle does not exist, he says, any more than Time and Space, in reality, exist; but the human mind and its means of perception are so constituted that they can conceive nothing without the threefold lemma of Time, Space, and Causality. These three notions are not qualities inherent in

the unknown and unknowable *Ding-an-Sich*; they do not, in fact, exist independently of the senses of the recognizing subject. On the contrary, they belong to this subject exclusively, and are meaningless, non-existent, apart from the existence of the subject. He denies the possibility of recognizing any metaphysical object whatever, anything, indeed, that lies outside the possible perception of the perceiving senses, while even the senses themselves deceive us by virtue of their very nature. While therefore Schopenhauer does not in terms either deny or assert the existence of a First Cause, his denial really strikes far deeper. What he denies is the possibility, the reasonableness, of the question itself, on the ground that it is meaningless, the metaphysical conception of a First Cause being an unjustifiable application of the principle of causality extended outside the sphere of the senses, and landing us in the region of nonsense. Such is the reply of Schopenhauer to our inquiry. From these extreme views we turn to Hegel, of whom he was the bitterest and most deadly opponent. Hegelism, which is

generally spoken of as a discredited, if not exploded, system, has been called the last refuge of the orthodox. Here the more antiquated metaphysical proofs of a Supreme Being are set aside as unnecessary. To Schopenhauer the world was but the perception of a perceiver, which in the absence of the perceiver would not exist, and the perceiver here is Man. To Hegel the world was equally the perception of a perceiver, the thought of a thinker; but the perceiver and the thinker is God. For with Hegel The Absolute must be the ground of everything, and so far independent of anything else. If the former modes of demonstration in rational theology are applied to the existence of The Absolute, it can only mean that that existence is to depend on other terms, which will then constitute its ground. Hegel himself says:

"The metaphysical proofs of God's existence have been treated as if a knowledge of them and a conviction of their truth were the only and essential means of producing a belief and conviction that there is a God. Such a doctrine would find its parallel if we said that eating was impossible before we had

acquired a knowledge of the chemical, botanical, and zoological characters of our food; and that we must delay digestion till we had finished the study of anatomy and physiology. . . . Man is essentially a thinker; and therefore sound common-sense, as well as philosophy, will not yield up their right of rising to God from and out of the empirical view of the world. The only basis on which this rise is possible is the thinking study of the world, not the bare sensuous, animal attuition of it. Thought, and thought alone, has eyes for the essence, substance, universal power, and ultimate design of the world. And what men call the proofs of God's existence are, rightly understood, ways of describing and analyzing the native course of the mind, the course of thought *thinking* the data of the senses. The rise of thought beyond the world of sense, its passage from the finite to the infinite, the leap into the supersensible which it takes when it snaps asunder the chain of sense—all this transition is thought, and nothing but thought. Say there must be no such passage, and you say there is to be no thinking. And in sooth animals make no such transition; they never get further than sensation and the perception of the senses, and in consequence they have no religion."

The relationship existing on this point between Hegel and Kant is that which subsists between the system of Subjective Idealism

and that of Absolute Idealism. Hegel allows that Kant did considerable service when he enforced the finite character of the cognition of the understanding founded merely upon experience. But he continues:

"Kant's *Ding-an-Sich* (and under *Ding* is embraced the Mind of God) expresses the object when we leave out of sight all that consciousness makes of it, all its emotional aspects, and all specific thoughts of it. It is easy to see what is left—utter abstraction, total emptiness, only described still as 'another world'—the negative of every image, feeling, and definite thought. . . . Hence one can only read with surprise the perpetual remark that we do not know the *Ding-an-Sich*. On the contrary, there is nothing we can know so easily."

The position of Kant himself is well known. Kant lays stress upon the distinction between phenomena and noumena, those unseen realities of which appearances are a manifestation only. He applies the term 'noumenon' *par excellence* to the Supreme Being, which may be conceived of, but can never be an object of perception. The ideas of the reason are purely speculative, and nothing but simple conceptions, for which no

corresponding object can be scientifically shown to exist; thus, the existence of a Supreme Being can never be demonstratively established. On practical and moral grounds, however, which have all the force of a Categorical Imperative, the existence of a Supreme Being must be acknowledged even by those who admit it merely upon subjective grounds. According to Leibnitz, it is through his cognition of 'eternal' or 'necessary' truths that man rises to a knowledge of the Divine Nature; all 'contingent' truths must have an ultimate cause, since otherwise we must assume an infinite series of contingencies in which reason would be lost. This ultimate cause is the Supreme Being, who is also the source of all 'eternal' or 'necessary' ideas and truths; these have their reason in the Divine Nature, and thus differ from 'contingent' truths, which are arbitrary, and determined by the Divine Will. Fichte, again, holds that finite and conditioned being necessarily leads to the assumption of an Infinite Being, or Absolute, which Religion calls God; indeed, he regards

the Supreme or Absolute as the only true Being, repudiating the charge of atheism with indignation. John Stuart Mill follows Hume in taking up an empirical and sensationalist standpoint, and attacks the 'eternal' or 'necessary' truths of Leibnitz, on which that thinker bases his proof of a Supreme Being, while Mr. G. H. Lewes has only less scorn for the whole system of metaphysics than he has for dogmatic theology. One is almost tempted to sympathize with him. It is all a clash of words. We might extend our recapitulations over pages upon pages, but the above are sufficient for our purpose.

The fact is that the arguments of metaphysics are incapable of verification. There are no solid, objective realities answering to the theories advanced, by which they can be tried or tested. A scientific traditionalist may be converted to Darwinianism, because there are facts to go upon; zoology, embryology, palæontology, are all at hand with their array of tangible and demonstrable objectivities; but Schopenhauer will never convert Hegel, or Berkeley be persuaded by Lewes. It is clear, therefore, that

from the foremost exponents of what we call Philosophy we shall not receive a satisfactory answer to our question, seeing that it is not a system at unity with itself; the standpoints are too numerous, the processes too divergent. All we have any right to say is that, *counting heads*, we shall find more advocates for Theism than opponents. The validity of this very democratic test is naturally open to question, but we fail to see what other way there is. What we need is a systematic Theory of Knowledge, and that we do not possess. There are as many schools of metaphysical thought as there are schools of religious thought; they cannot all be true; and who is to decide between them?*

We owe this, however, to metaphysics—that it helps us to get rid of no small amount of that crude anthropomorphism which seems in-

* What I mean here is, that, among so many conflicting systems, we must take our choice. In the preceding essay (see p. 74) I have assumed metaphysical grounds for the existence of a Supreme Being. Such systems as are anti-theistic have been ignored. The question now is: Can the conclusions of a theistic metaphysic be supported by an appeal to physical science?

separable from all purely religious ideas of the Supreme Being. That is an immense gain so far. Let us now see how we fare in an appeal to physical Science.

We will plunge at once *in medias res*. The ultimate fact in physical Science, as at present understood, is unquestionably Matter. But what *is* Matter—this most mysterious quantity that has called forth so many attempts at definition, but which yet remains as profound an enigma as ever? Can it be defined at all? Must we rest satisfied with calling it a permanent possibility of sensation? Are we justified in assuming that it has no objective existence, or in regarding it as the projection of some incognoscible phantom 'substance' after the manner of the Realists? How, in a word, are we to deal with it? Well, there is one attribute of Matter which is of such transcendent significance as to suggest the hope that in it may eventually be found the key to the mystery. We allude to the presence, in Matter, of Force. Now, Force is not only present in Matter, but it is inseparable from it. Its mere

presence may be detected at a glance. It is Force, in some form or other, that makes the tree grow and put forth leaves; it is Force that is at work in the processes of decay, of disintegration, of the transformation of the organic into the inorganic; it is Force that keeps the worlds in their accustomed orbits, and holds, in its firm grip, the compacted particles of every material body. What makes a stone so hard? Why do its component grains of matter stick together? To what does it owe its existence as a stone? The answer to all is to be found in the same word, Force. Suppose, now, the Force that holds the stone together were suddenly withdrawn, what would happen? Clearly, the million atoms of which it is composed would fly apart and vanish, the stone, as a stone, disappearing before our eyes. Apply the same process to the Universe, and the same result would follow: worlds, suns, galaxies and systems would alike vanish into nothingness, and we should have nothing left but—what? For the discrete atoms into which our worlds and systems have been dissolved are as much

Matter as they were in their compound form. Each is a point, or seat, or centre, of Force; each is a particle of Matter, be it cube or sphere, infinitesimal in size, but as really Matter as a mountain or a mastodon; and we have to suppose these, too, deprived of Force in precisely the same way as the bodies they once formed have been. It would certainly appear, then, as though the abstraction of Force from these elementary units of Matter could have but one result—the annihilation of Matter itself. Here we are face to face with a profoundly interesting problem. Force is not only present in Matter, but is shown to be inseparable from it, since, if we withdrew Force, Matter would cease to exist. But the indestructibility of Matter is a scientific axiom. Both on empirical and metaphysical grounds this is regarded as absolutely beyond dispute. How are these conflicting positions to be reconciled? The solution is perhaps not difficult, but it involves a conclusion so startling that one may well hesitate to put it forward. *Matter has no independent existence whatever.* It is simply Force

in Action, Force made Visible, Force Corporealized. Its best definition would be *Consolidated Force*; so that it is just as absurd to try and abstract Force from Matter in order to see what Matter would do and how it would look without it, as it would be to try and abstract all the water from a block of pure ice, and expect to retain some solid substance or precipitate.

If this be true, the question as to the indestructibility of Matter is superseded. The problem resolves itself into the destructibility or indestructibility of Force. What is Force, apart from that principle which constitutes the elementary units of Matter? It implies, we are told, the existence of some prior cause which produces a visible mechanical effect. Then there is something behind Force. And that which lies behind Force is nothing else than the Inscrutable Power that Mr. Spencer calls The Unknowable, but to which many of Mr. Spencer's acutest critics give another name. Force is indestructible, *because it is the manifestation, in working, of an indestructible Life.*

And now mark what we discover. Impossible as the existence of Matter apart from Force is found to be—if, indeed, as we believe, Matter is nothing more than Force raised to the *n*th power, and so corporealized—the two belong to different categories of apprehension. The latest scientific teaching banishes the conception of Force, *per se*, from the realm of physics altogether, on the ground that there we have nothing but Matter and Motion; while Force, the underlying, omnipresent Force, is relegated to the domain of psychology as inseparable from the idea of *Will*. Now, Will implies Intelligence, and both proceed from Life. Matter, Force, and Will are thus inextricably bound up together in the world around us. Matter depends on Force, Force on Will, and Will on Life. The whole Universe is pulsating and palpitating with Life. Everywhere this Life exists and works, in inorganic as well as in organic matter. Nothing is really at rest; nothing is in a state of 'being' only, everything is in a state of 'becoming.' Change and decay in all around we see, but what we

too often do not see is that decay is nothing but a process, a transition state in which Life is as active as ever, in which the apparently dying matter is simply passing from one stage of being to another. There is no death; there is only change, and we are misled by appearances. When the primæval forest springs beautifully up from a few seeds and acorns, we are ready enough to recognize the presence and working of the living principle; but when that forest, having reached its maturity as a forest, begins to undergo its further inevitable changes—when, in the lapse of æons, it sinks gradually lower and lower into the soil until it is submerged, and there becomes slowly transformed from organic into inorganic matter—we forget that the same Force is working in that apparently inert mass which vitalized the growing tree, and that disintegration, putrefaction, condensation, expansion, and contraction are in themselves evidence of the eternal, ever active, underlying Life. Burn a bit of your primæval forest in the shape of a lump of coal, and you get rid of its external accidents; but its essence is un-

touched, and will live on in various and successive modes for ever. In everything there is this *something which persists.* There is not a shred of matter in the Universe to-day, whether on the table at which I am now writing, or in the furthest star in space, which has not existed in some form or other ever since the Beginning of Beginnings; and it will go on existing, as far as we can tell, to all eternity. Everywhere there is interaction, based apparently on law, and forming a system which, being at one with itself, is therefore unitary and intelligible. Life, says Mr. Clodd, using the word in its empirical and restricted sense, is nothing but a local or temporary arrest of the universal movement toward equilibrium. In other words, he teaches us that organization is to be regarded as the cause of life; but a deeper insight opens up a grander view, and justifies us in recognizing in the universal, transcendental Life the cause of organization.

And now, what is this Life? The author of 'Synthetic Philosophy' calls it a Power, and says that it is both Unknown and Unknowable.

In this he reminds one rather of Zophar the Naamathite. "Canst thou by searching find out God?" asks Zophar. Yes—in so far as He is recognizable in His manifestations. "Canst thou find out the Almighty to perfection?" pursues the illogical man. Of course not, for that would imply that the finite can grasp the infinite, which is a mathematical absurdity. If, however, as Mr. Spencer avers, it is this Power which wells up in each of us in the form of consciousness, we may surely, on that very ground, find out something on which to take our stand. The mere fact of its existence, one would think, is no small matter. Moreover, the very statement of Mr. Spencer that it is 'unknown' would almost seem to invalidate the further statement that it is 'unknowable'; for if nothing is known about it, how can anyone be sure whether it is knowable or not? By the very terms of the proposition the collocation of the two words is illegitimate. This, however, seems to involve the paradox that only by a knowledge of the Power have we any right to say that it is 'unknowable'—which is a contradiction again—

the fact being that a partial knowledge of the Power is necessary before we have any logical ground for concluding that a complete knowledge is, and ever must be, beyond us. No one can ever hope to understand the Eternal Reality in its noumenal structure, any more than that essence of things-in-themselves, that something which persists, whether in our own consciousness or in external Nature; but this does not shut the door in our faces at the outset, with a "Thus far shalt thou go, and no farther." The difficulty, one cannot but suspect, is partly, at any rate, of Mr. Spencer's own making. He lays down a theoretical *non possumus* at starting, only to find immediately afterwards that it is not justified by facts. Nothing, he says, for instance, is more certain than our knowledge of ourselves, *except* the fact that by the very laws of thought all such self-knowledge is impossible.* So much the worse for the laws of thought! one is tempted to reply. That bodies can under no circumstances act at a distance, that there must be a medium of communication

* 'First Principles.' Also for the following instances.

between them, is quoted by Mr. Spencer as an axiom of scientific orthodoxy; and yet he goes on to show that the molecules of ether, the bridge or medium that has been hypothesized to fill the vacuum in interstellar space, and so account for the play of gravitation, heat, and light, are as far apart, in proportion to their size, as the very stars are from each other, so that the gulf is not bridged over after all. What becomes, then, of his axiom? And so when he discusses the relation of his Unknowable Power to the world. There are only three ways, he tells us, in which the Universe can be accounted for, and all three, says Mr. Spencer, involve unthinkabilities and contradictions. They all land us in confusion. They all run counter to the laws of thought, and furnish us with no solution of the problem. Mr. Spencer again fails to have the courage of his logic. He does not adopt the inexorable conclusion, and tell us boldly that the Universe doesn't exist. Alas! nobody would believe him. The Universe does exist, and refuses to be explained away in spite of the fact that there are only three ways in

which it can be accounted for, and that every one of these lands us in unthinkabilities. Here, again, the laws of thought are hopelessly at loggerheads with unquestionable facts, and Mr. Spencer washes his hands of the whole business in despair.

The world, as we now know, *grew;* it was evolved by inevitable processes from the primordial germs. The simile of the watch, as Professor Fiske beautifully and convincingly puts it, has been replaced by the simile of the flower. There are still some strangely constituted people, I believe, who shrink from this statement as atheistic. They see the flower being evolved from its seed, and find no difficulty in reconciling this fact with their favourite formula that God 'made' the flower; yet they steadfastly refuse, even with this exquisite analogy before their eyes, to believe that the Universe was in like manner evolved from *its* seed, because it sounds incompatible with their empirical notions of creation. But we can trace this world-growth back to the very seed itself. We may assert without fear of authoritative

contradiction that the whole visible Universe was evolved from nebula; that this nebula was evolved from discrete elemental molecules; and that these molecules were evolved from ultimate units of protyle, which were the original staple. Now, then; whence came this staple?

Dr. Chapman, in his ingenious and suggestive work on 'Pre-organic Evolution,' speaks of phenomena as eternally and potentially existing in the one Noumenon; that is to say, in other language, that matter was always, from all past eternity, latent in the essence of the Supreme Being. This theory may be applied in either of the two following ways. First, the Universe, differentiated and undifferentiated, is the Eternal Shadow of the Eternal Substance, the Eternal Form of an Eternal Activity. The Eternal Reality was never *only* Reality, but always Reality as manifested in matter and its changes. This is what Rothe means by his aphorism, 'Ohne Welt, kein Gott.'

"It is quite true," says Dr. Chapman, "that the Reality referred to is termed Cause in the proper philosophical sense of that word, and consequently

the Manifestation is Effect; but the point to be carefully noted is that the causal connection is logical, not chronological. . . . The phenomena which we, from our point of view, arrange as before and after one another, are only, according to the Spencerian conception, the continuation of one great act of the Eternal Reality which has been going on ever since the Eternal Reality has been in existence—that is, from all eternity."

Here manifestation is regarded as a necessary or intrinsic attribute of the Supreme Being; but it may be considered, secondly, as a voluntary or contingent attribute. This alternative represents that at a certain point in duration the Eternal Cause emerged out of abstract existence as a Power active within itself into Power as expressed in other forms of working—in the continuous maintenance of existences which, though manifestations of itself, are nevertheless not itself, which are therefore dependent upon the Eternal Cause, and are not self-subsistent.

Now it seems to me that this conception, in whichever form we adopt it, is one of consummate grandeur and beauty. It is the most satis-

factory suggestion that I have ever met with. It renders both unnecessary and impossible the crude idea of creation out of nothing, which must always violate those innate notions of causality of which, try how we may, we can never wholly rid ourselves. It brings God and the Universe nearer to each other; the Universe, instead of being an arbitrary creation of raw material, subsequently manufactured into organisms and systems, and therefore *outside* its Maker, is seen to be a part of its Maker Himself, a manifestation of His invisibility, a reflection of His substance, a materialization of His essence, a projection of His thought, a vehicle of His presence, a form in and through which He is eternally exercising His sustaining, vivifying, organizing power. He is the Life which lies at the back of Force, and thus enables Matter to exist, which is more to the world than steam to the engine, breath to the animal, mind itself to man. How can we best express the *beginning* of this close relationship? Someone has suggested that instead of creation we should say secretion; that we should think

of the Supreme Being, by some law of His own nature, secreting Matter very much as a humble mollusc secretes its shell. The word is perhaps an improvement on the old one, but surely not the best. It introduces a new idea into the order of things, and is not in sufficient harmony with what we know of cosmic processes. May we not venture to apply to this great primæval act the word that we apply to all subsequent acts? May we not apply the principle of *evolution* to this mysterious event also? Is it irreligious, is it unmetaphysical, is it unscientific, to suppose that evolution did not begin when the ultimate atoms were welded into elemental molecules, but that the atoms themselves—the fine, rare, subtle beginnings of the infinite cosmos—were evolved straight from the structural essence of the great First Cause?

But all this, it will be said, is Pantheism. Suppose it is—what then? What matters it, Pantheism or Pot-theism, as Carlyle exclaimed, if it be true? So far from Pantheism, rightly understood, being a theory antagonistic to Monotheism, it is simply one side of it, and

that a necessary side, if we accept the religious doctrine of omnipresence. It is nothing more than the Immanence of Deity—of the Life which permeates every item and every atom of the Universe, without which no matter, no force, could conceivably exist, which, as Professor Flint says, is in every ray of sunlight, every breath of wind—the source and the life of all human minds and human hearts. When a Chinese philosopher was asked two thousand years ago where it was to be found, he answered, "There is no place where it is not; you will find it in this ant, in that brick, in any bit of grass."* St. Paul himself, whose orthodoxy has never, I believe, been questioned, supports the same view in the words, "In whom we live and move and have our being," and "Of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things," besides the remarkable statement that "the *invisible* things of Him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the *things that are made*—viz., His eternal power and Divinity,' clearly showing (1) that, in the writer's mind, the

* Chuang-tzŭ's 'Classic of Nan Hua.'

underlying noumenon was the Divine essence; and (2) that it might be clearly recognized, although invisible. And this noumenon, this essence, this Life which maintains and vivifies, is also the Origin and Cause. It is difficult *at first* for the mind to grasp the concept of an uncaused cause—difficult not to try and go back further still, and launch itself upon the hopeless, endless voyage of eternal regressions. But we soon see that this leads to the annihilation of all mental processes.

"To say," writes Professor Flint, in his Baird Lecture on 'Theism,' "that the idea of cause can never demand belief in an uncaused cause sounds self-evident; to say that the idea of cause can find no satisfaction save in the belief of an uncaused cause sounds a paradox; but let a man meditate for a little with real thoughtfulness on the meaning of these two statements, and he cannot fail to perceive that the former is an undeniable falsehood, the latter an undeniable truth. An uncaused cause—a first cause—alone answers truly to the idea of a cause. A secondary cause, in so far as secondary, is not a cause. I witness some event—some change. I am compelled as a rational being to seek its cause. I reach it only to find that this cause was due to a

prior cause. What has happened? The cause from which I have had to go back has ceased to be a cause; the cause to which I have had to go back has become the cause of two effects, but it will remain so only if I am not reasonably bound to seek a cause for it. If I am, its causality must pass over to its explanatory antecedent. . . . A true cause is one in which the reason not only moves, but in which it rests, and except in a first cause the mind cannot rest. A first cause, however, is certainly not one which has itself been caused. . . . No chain or series can be, properly speaking, infinite or without a first link or term. . . . Particular causes and secondary movements lead back to a Cause of causes, a First Mover, itself immovable, yet making all things else to move."

Striking indeed is the resemblance between this and the words of yet another Chinese sage, belonging to the same school as the one already quoted :

'There is a Life that is uncreated ;
There is a Transformer who is changeless.
The Uncreated alone can produce life,
The Changeless alone can evolve change.
That Life cannot but produce ;
That Transformer cannot but transform.

* * * * *

The Uncreated stands, as it were, alone;
The Changeless comes and goes;
Its duration can have no end,
Peerless and One, it is past our finding out.'*

There are those, no doubt, who, acknowledging a metaphysical First Cause, see no absurdity in tracing consciousness, intelligence, order, regularity, and that 'dramatic tendency' in the scheme of things which they are not able to deny, back to the blind workings of an unconscious, unintelligent, irrational, mechanical, mindless Force. It is difficult to discover much difference between this state of mind and that which induces a pagan or a savage to attribute power for good or evil to a block of senseless wood; it is simply a cultured form of idolatry, with this exception, that the unconscious deity is worshipped in one case and only formulated in the other. Eternal consciousness is surely not more difficult of conception than eternal unconsciousness;† and given consciousness, intelligence, and power, given the evidences of

* Lieh-tzŭ, 'The Classic of Fulness and Emptiness.'

† See Professor Bowne's 'Philosophy of Theism,' p. 132 *et seq.* Bowne studied under Lotze personally.

purpose which are even more clearly visible from the evolutionary standpoint than they ever were or could be in the days of Paley, what more, we may ask, is wanting to complete all possible requirements for gathering the whole up into the one word Personality?—an attribute which, as Professor Bowne suggests, so far from implying limitation, as some philosophers do vainly talk, is possible only in its fullest sense, *not* to finite beings, but to The Absolute?

And it is in these considerations that we may find that grandest and truest teleology which is the outcome of purpose and foreknowledge. When Professor Tyndall was on the Matterhorn, he pictured to himself that nebulous haze which men of science have regarded as the source of all existing things. "I tried," he says, "to look at this universal cloud as containing within itself the prediction of all that has since occurred. I tried to imagine it as the seat of those forces whose action was to issue in solar and stellar systems and all that they involve. Did that formless fog contain poten-

tially the sadness with which I regarded the Matterhorn? Did the thought which now ran back to it simply return to its primæval home?" The conception is too fine not to be true. Just as we, contemplating an acorn, see in it the giant oak, with its powerful fibres, its spreading branches, and its wealth of leaves, all inevitable products of the forces already existing in that small nut, so must the Eternal Reality have seen in that 'formless fog' the embryos of everything yet to come: the evolution of a million suns, the birth of all inorganic and organic matter, the myriad forms of vegetable and animal existence, the activities, hopes, fears, loves, hates, passions, and struggles of man, the groping speculations after truth, the rise and fall of religions and philosophies, empires and republics, the conquests of nations, the genius of Plato, of Shakespeare, of Newton, of Wagner, the Renaissance of the Middle Ages, the French Revolution of 1792, and the World's Fair of 1893; all, all to be evolved from that wondrous and prolific Mother Nebula, by a series of causations as closely welded, as inevitable, as fore-

seeable, as the sprouting of a flower from its seed.

Such I believe to be a legitimate conclusion from what we know of cosmic processes to-day. I claim that the answer we receive from Science to the question with which we started is all but unequivocal. I have purposely omitted dealing with the grounds on which Religion bases her doctrine of a Supreme Being—supernatural revelation, subjective experiences, fulfilment of prophecy, and so forth—not because so much is objectively unverifiable, but because that doctrine stands forward as the hypothesis we have to test. Metaphysics, as we have seen, do not help us much; they rather bewilder us with involved logomachies, a confusion of tongues, a Babel of dissentient voices crying in the trackless wilderness of abstract thought. Yet even here the majority are in our favour. The ayes have it, so far at any rate, and the more cordial becomes the *entente* between Religion and Science, the less likelihood there is of a recrudescence of atheistical metaphysics. Already the two have lost much of their mutual

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